



## **Teatime Talks: The Impact of Education on Deaf Individuals in 19th Century Ireland**

00:04

Okay, well I'd like to say welcome to you all to come to this tea time talk here in 14 Henrietta Street. And I'm very delighted to share my passion for deaf history with you all this evening.

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And the topic I'm going to talk about is here, up on the PowerPoint, the impact of education on deaf people in 19th century Ireland. So,

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let me go through this material. Oh, before I forget, we're going to be talking about education in the nineteenth century.

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But first of all, we need to figure out What was happening prior to that? What was happening before the 1850s or so? We need to have that background very clear before we go on.

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And I'm going to talk about different case studies to exemplify what was going on for deaf people. These are all real case studies, actual deaf individuals. The first case study is a deaf man whose name I still can't identify.

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But I'll talk about him And the information comes from an 1880s story. Now, this is a story that the source of which came from the 1880s,

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but it's about a deaf person prior to that. It's about a deaf person who lived long before the 1850s. An artist from England, in the early part of the 19th century,

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went to the west coast of Ireland to draw some watercolours, and he was working at his art one day, painting away and noticed an individual approaching him.

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And the painter tried to say, "Hello, good afternoon. How are you? Can I help you?" But there was no response. This person didn't speak. He was making strange noises in his throat.

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He had grey clothes, kind of straggly, unkempt hair and beard but seemed quite harmless so the artist continued about his work but the man who approached him seemed very interested in what was going on and what the artist was doing.

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So the artist ended up in a nearby village a little bit later on and went into a local tavern and asked if anyone knew anything about this strange individual and they told him I don't mind him he's just the town dummy and the artist said no no sorry but what is his name?

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Oh sure I don't know sure no one knows his name should we just wander around begging for food? And that struck the artist as strange. The first kind of education prior to the 19th century going to talk about exemplifies this no education at all And we need to understand a phrase that's vital here,

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the language deprivation syndrome. And I'll delve into a little bit of psychology as well as history when I'm talking about this particular kind of syndrome.

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If you imagine a child between the ages of zero and five years old, this is a vital time in terms of their language acquisition,

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in terms of their cognitive development, absolutely vital period. If a child doesn't have access to language within that period, it has very negative effects on the language and cognitive development of the child.

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And beyond that period, they don't really learn language or acquire language. It's a kind of form of acquired brain damage that comes about from not having access to language and it means obviously that they can't interact and communicate with people around them and one Aboriginal scholar from Australia,

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one woman, has an explanation for this that this isn't just an issue of language but also one of culture. This can possibly represent a cultural deprivation.

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The man in my story didn't know his own name. He didn't know his own identity. He had no idea who he was and his relationship to the others around him.

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So it becomes a situation of survival of the fittest in a way. That's the first case study. The second case study I want to talk about are deaf people who did have a certain access to family trades.

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I will talk about that a bit later on, But they might have had formal education So you're talking about deaf people born into families where they might have worked let's say as tailors They might have learned that from observation of family members in that same trade and picked up those skills along the way and So they were able to make a living and contribute to supporting the family through the observation of what

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their family were doing. That's one kind of education. Another kind of situation would be private tutors that some deaf people would have had access to over the years, and have given you three different examples of deaf individuals from that background.

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They were able to get education through private tutors. So three deaf individuals, we've got Lady Mary O'Brien, who lived in County Cork. She had a deaf sister as well,

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and there's not an awful lot of information about her sister, I don't know what her name is, but both of the ladies had a private tutor from England who used a form of finger spelling to educate the two ladies

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They learned to read and write, and when they grew up, They became proper ladies, members of the landed gentry. They would have supported the royal cause in Ireland.

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They would have been very involved in that and so on. They would have been born in the 17, 20, 30s or so. The second example is a deaf gentleman named John Burns.

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John Burns was an orphan, his parents would have died on a house fire, he lived in County Monaghan and his parents died when he was 10 years old, he was orphaned. And he was quite fortunate because there was a local church of Ireland clergyman who helped to educate him and teach him to read and write.

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And so John Burns grew up, was literate, was educated and had his own business. Now, he had a sad story. He died when he was only 45 years of age, but he seemed to be the first person who was born deaf and who used sign language,

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who also wrote and published a book. And that's how we know of John Burns. I'm sure a lot of you know Jonathan Swift,

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who is another very famous Irish writer who suffered hearing lost later in life, but we also have John Burns who was born deaf. So Burns,

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his story is quite sad. He ended up in a debtor's prison and suffered from depression all after his wife passed away.

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He wasn't able to support his children, he was in a debtor's prison, he didn't know what to do, and he decided to write this book and sell it in order to raise money, to pay off his debts and also to be able to feed his family.

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He had two children, so he needed to support them by writing his book. So the third example there on point three is Samson Toegood Roach, born in Renvitt 1760,

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1770, And Roach, again, had access to a private tutor as a deaf child. He became very well known as a portrait painter,

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those little miniatures that you would see at the time. He was paid very well to paint these. And he was well known in particular for painting watercolors of everyday life,

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scenes of everyday life. And his work was extremely popular and cause to stir, a lot of the time it was because it was very rare for people to see watercolors of everyday life before the famine.

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So the famine in the 1840s, before then you would have portraits of rich people of themselves, but very little scenes of just everyday life in the country,

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people washing their clothes, people rowing a boat. boat. All these different scenes of normal rural life Roach was able to capture in his watercolors.

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Point number four here is a different kind of educational background. Mainstream education I suppose you might call it for deaf people. I've mentioned the names of two deaf pupils there.

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Thomas Collins is the first and Agnes Biedem is a very well known figure in Irish deaf history. Thomas Collins was the first deaf pupil in Claremont, which was the first deaf school in Ireland and open in 1916.

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But before Thomas Collins went to a deaf school, he was in the house of industry, which is an old name for one of the workhouses in Dublin. So a gentleman named Dr.

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Charles Orpin worked in the house of industry and was very interested in Collins and he decided to set up a school for Collins and other deaf children within the house of industry.

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Agnes Beatham came a few couple of decades later on. She was a young child and she was educated when the Catholic institution for the deaf and dumb, which was what the institution was called at the time,

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was set up in 1845. Now, prior to their school's opening, they went to France and learned how to educate deaf children, and Agnes Beaton was the first girl to enter the school of St.

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Mary's for deaf girls. So they are kind of the main, the first examples of mainstream schools being opened for deaf children. Now, I'm mentioning Lord Carberry here,

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but I'm talking about the 1810s and 1820s. It's a bit later than the other examples have given, but that's because it's linked to my next point. Lord Carberry was born in the very first decade of the 19th century,

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had access to a private tutor, and his parents were lords and ladies, members of the gentry. They didn't want a son who was uneducated,

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so they wondered where they could send their deaf son and they decided to send him to Paris and Paris at the time had a very well-known school for deaf girls and boys so he was educated abroad.

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Any questions before I go on? It's a question what is the difference between the house of industry and the workhouses? Personally I think that the difference was really just in the period you're talking about.

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So that's what it was called at one period and then it changed its name. The actual system itself might have been slightly different as well in terms of the policies, but really the big difference is just the years that you're talking about the period.

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So the house of industry reflected a period where people were considered to be vagrants or layabouts and were kind of herded into this institution, but the workhouse was quite a different system in terms of its ambitions and its system.

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The house of industry is just an earlier phase of the workhouse system. Any more questions at this point? I don't expect you to read all the details here in this slide.

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There's quite a lot of information, but you can see all the different schools for deaf children that were established during the 19th century in this country. The first school was open in 1816,

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and you can see at the very, you might kind of think to yourself, then what is so important about this? Well, education for deaf children in Ireland,

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it's very important to keep three things in mind. First of all, One of the aims of the people found in these schools was that the deaf children would learn faith They wanted them to learn a bit God They wanted them to learn the Bible.

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It was a really key driver to setting up these schools Education literacy was the second driver, but they also wanted deaf children to become citizens Not just dependents on society,

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but contributors to society So they wanted to do that by giving deaf children literacy and skills in order for them to contribute to society and be citizens.

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So that represents Ireland after 1816. But did all deaf children at that point get education?

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Well, for a long period most deaf children still didn't. It often depended on their family, it certainly depended on their family before 1816, when there were no schools available. Many of them didn't get access to education and had to do farm work or other kind of labor,

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but then 1816 saw these schools being established. Now later this profile changed in terms of the numbers of deaf children that actually received an education in these institutions,

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as we'll see. You can see the years here going from left to right and you can see that there's a growing population of deaf children who have been in deaf schools,

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who have received an education. So altogether from the start of this period, you can see the years that these schools were established, each school educated a different cohort of children,

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and then at the end of 1911 you've got a total of this here at the bottom right. So from 1816 to 1911 deaf people who received an education,

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6,135. So just over 6,000 in almost a hundred years. If you think about it, it's not a huge number is it? You might expect more deaf children to be educated than this.

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But these are the people who are looking up to have been educated, right? So it's important to be aware of the size of that community. And this is important too,

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the number of teachers who were deaf themselves in Ireland over the years. So have a look 1861. There's There's no male teachers,

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Mary's would send their ex-pupils off to become teacher pupils. So in Louisiana this happened, in the States, in Cape Town,

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in South Africa, and in Newcastle, in Australia,

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Newcastle is not far from Sydney. So those are three schools that were established using the expertise of St. Mary's and Cabra and using their deaf ex-pupils.

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But here in Ireland, in West Mead, there was another school that also used St. Mary's expertise as well,



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so it wasn't just in Ireland where you saw this expertise being used, it was also elsewhere. Just to talk about this area of trades for a second and what is a trade. These are different kinds of occupations that are considered,

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you know, there are specific crafts that involve training with a master as an apprentice for a number of years. So you have to practice that craft,

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carpentry. Blacksmiths would make metal objects and repair them like tools, horseshoes, grates. You've got carpentries that would build barrels.

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That's especially important as well in this period. barrels are made out of wood and obviously they have their consisting of lots of different components and They're kind of sealed at the top by metal hoops You've got Koopers Koopers are these barrel makers You've got lace workers You've got shoemakers or cobblers tailors and seamstresses dress workers,

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working on those old sewing machines that I'm sure you're familiar with, and weavers. And it's interesting because most of the time the weavers who were making this fabric that was used for clothes,

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people often weaved baskets as well. But most basket weavers were blind rather than death. I found evidence of one death basket weaver and I have consulted with someone who says that there was there was a few more death basket weavers but it's been an interesting profession to look at.

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So these are the jobs and occupations that I refer to when I talk about trades in this presentation. So the Deaf Heritage Museum has a number of these slides and visual displays I'm using here in the presentation.

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writing heavily on reading, writing, and arithmetic, the three oars, and trades were heavily taught there. The trades in St. Joseph's School for Deaf Boys and Cabaret were particularly the ones shown here.

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Tailoring, harness making, or making leather saddles, cobbling, or shoemaking, baking also. There's an old sign for baking which shows the elbows at work here and the kneading of the dough which reflects this very old sign.

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You've got carpentry as I say and you've got metalwork. All right so you can see the cobbling at work here and these pictures are done by a deaf artist who is himself a teacher.

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Thomas Mahon was his name. He worked in the deaf school in Cabra. You can see the black background here. In the deaf heritage center you'll see that there were these old black curtains,

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but the old black curtains, old as they were, were reused to teach the boys in this picture form about about the different trades and to teach them language in relation to these different kind of trades.

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So tailoring and again Thomas Mann is the artist who did these pictures. So it's lovely, lovely pieces of work here that you can see by Thomas Mann, and I just want to talk about one pupil,

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Mary Cannelly, whose story is really, you know, it's one that really touched me, and she was a very selfless person. In the 1860s, Mary Cannelly was in the Malo Workhouse,

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a deaf woman and she wrote a letter to the nuns and the Catholic Institute of the deaf and dumb in Dublin. And Mary Kennedy said in the letter,

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"Can you please set something up for deaf people? I want to go to school to learn to read and write and learn more about God, but I also want to learn trade.

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Can you help me?" So, I was decided to do something along these lines, and the timing was perfect, because a workroom had just been constructed for older women in St.

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Mary's school. Prior to the 1860s, the girls who entered St. Mary's were limited to those of age up to 16.

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But there were a lot of older women who wanted to be admitted to some kind of institution, but nothing could be done for them. But when this workroom was constructed and ready, then women were brought from the workhouses,

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about 60 or 70 of them, to do some work like this. One woman was so old that she wasn't able to learn to read and write effectively at that late stage, but she certainly was able to learn seamstressing and lace work,

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St. Mary's had a workroom and focused on these industrial trades. So, that's St. Mary's. What about St. Joseph's?

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What about Claremont? St. Joseph's was the other one of the Catholic schools for deaf children, along with St. Mary's. Claremont was the Protestant school for deaf children. All of those three schools were in Dublin,

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and all three did offer some trades -based education and training. I don't know if any of you know the Christchurch area. There's a lovely,

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there's a building that's gorgeous. It's full of character. It's called Kinley House. It used to be a hostel.

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That particular building near Christchurch was used by a lot of the boys in Claremont when they qualified school and left school.

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And it was kind of used for further education for a lot of those deaf boys from Claremont. They would go to Kidney House as young men and receive trades -related training there.

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So there was a kind of a cluster of them in the Christchurch area. So St. Joseph's and St. Mary's went about things in a very different way and they did it all in-house. Any questions at this point before I go on.

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Is this room in St. Mary's? It is indeed, yes, yes. Yes, it was, whereabouts in the building was it? It was kind of up at the top floor. It was used,

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it was used for, I Don't know if any of you are familiar with the Irish sweepstakes.

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Yes, I know you used to work there. Yeah, that's right Well, in the that was in the 1930s that the sweepstakes came about Okay So that would have meant that money was given to the schools in cabra so So there was a wing in St.

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Mary's called the sweep wing And 1902 is where this picture is from, so this room is in the older part of the building upstairs, so it's not in the sweep wing.

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This is a really interesting diagram here and a statistic to bear in mind. A lot of schools, as we've seen, were established in the 19th century for deaf children,

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and that began in 1816. At the time you had huge amounts of deaf children without any education. And then if you look at the number of deaf children who had education at the time in 1851 at the start of this diagram,

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it's still very low. So if you think about formal and informal education, I suppose there is a difference. I'm talking about formal education here. Those who had gone to school, who are in a classroom,

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who are being taught by teachers. Informal education is very different to maybe they would have learned from family or learned from observation. So this diagram is just showing formally educated deaf children.

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And you can see the percentage of deaf children receiving education did rise through the years and uneducated deaf children, the percentage fell. But It begins in 1851,

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and as I've said, in 1816, the first deaf school opened. The years following saw more deaf schools being opened and more deaf children learning to read and write, gaining an education, and the percentage of deaf children who could read and write began to increase.

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But still in 1851, most deaf people couldn't read and write. And you can see that very clear drop in the numbers of uneducated deaf children over the years,

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that red line, and then the number of deaf children who received an education, you can see, is rising to the time. But it's rising slowly. And it was almost the turn of the century before you could say that most of deaf people in this country had an education.

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For most of the nineteenth century, most deaf people did not have an education, they could not read and write. So it's only at the turn of the century you saw that trend being reversed and the majority of deaf people being educated in schools,

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all right, yes. But how do those rates compare with hearing people and their education at that time? Well,

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in the early 19th century, the national school system was established and there was a push towards this, you know, national school's free education at primary level for hearing people, whereas for deaf schools they had to pay because this was a special kind of school and fees were involved.

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There was legislation to help parents of deaf children to pay off the cost of their education, though. So to answer your question, speaking comparatively,

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the general population, far more hearing people were educated than deaf people. The number of deaf people in comparison was very, very small. It didn't become standard to see deaf people being educated until much later.

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Anything else? So one really important thing here is Just to go back to that question there that you asked about education,

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and the fact of education being fee -based rather than free education. The majority of the boards of guardians at the time in Ireland,

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boards of guardians were responsible for running the workhouses that were all that were located around the country in the poor law unions and they would gather rates from the local population to do this and so once they had accumulated these rates and collected these rates I've a book here actually my article in this book would explain a little bit more about that as Donal has said there's a few free copies there,

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and maybe some more downstairs, and then you can find more in the library as well. The libraries are round Dublin. But the legislation at the time would have said, well, this was a guideline.

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It wasn't required. So just remember this. It wasn't a requirement on the boards of guardians. But the guideline was that a board of guardians individually could decide,

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the group of people running the work as could decide to contribute to the fees of deaf children going to deaf schools, up to 15 pounds a year, which is a substantial amount of money at the time for a family.

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So on what grounds was this decision made to pay or not? They would pay for deaf children to be educated on the basis that they were paying for deaf children to become good members of society,

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contributing to society, able to contribute to the economy, basically the boards of guardians were looking for a return in their investment. So this return in their investment was the key driver as to whether the boards would contribute or not.

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Now, a lot of boards of Guardians would think to themselves, well, let's look at this particular situation of this deaf child, I'm not sure if we're going to pay. Other boards of Guardians were far more willing to pay.

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And one interesting thing is that city workhouses, so for example Dublin City, Limerick City, Cork City, those boards of Guardians were kinder in that respect and were far more willing to part with the money to have deaf children educated,

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but rural workhouses were a very different story, maybe because they had less solid financing than urban workhouses. If they felt that a deaf child wasn't learning quickly enough or they weren't able to learn,

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the Board of Guardians would stop paying for their education and get them to come back to the workhouse. So a lot of them did finish their education when they were sent, but many didn't, and they often returned to the workhouse and had to stay there,

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okay? So, looking at deaf women in Dublin for a second.

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You can see a big difference in these two pie charts. The first one shows women and girls and A lot of the pupils are represented in this pie chart.

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Obviously St Mary's is in Dublin, you've also got Claremont in Dublin, so the amount of pupils, school pupils among the deaf population of Dublin is quite large and you can see this in the pie chart.

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So I said to myself looking at these figures. Hang on a second, let's leave school pupils out of the equation for a moment and focus on deaf women in Dublin who are adults,

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rather than just adults and children. And we get a slightly different picture. 53 % were unemployed in 1911. A lot of them lived in tenement buildings just like the one we're in now in Henrietta Street.

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However, we do have to remember that this second pie chart, people who lived in the 10-- people may have lived in the tenements,

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yes, but then there were others who were in institutions and who worked in those institutions. They may have worked as cleaners in schools. They may have worked as maids,

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domestic servants, laundresses, so in lots of institutions you would find deaf women living and doing that kind of work. So talking about literacy levels,

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I'd mentioned that before the advent of deaf education, or should I say before the establishment of deaf schools in Ireland. Most deaf people had never been to school,

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they couldn't read and write. I'm focusing on women here specifically. You can see a very, very small percentage here.

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Almost 90 % of deaf women signing deaf women were able to read and write in this particular statistic from 1911. But it does kind of,

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I did have a bit of a chuckle about this because the information here is from the census of Ireland and you have to remember that the census is not a hundred percent dependable.

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They were often filled in these census forms on behalf of other people and so you saw phrases like deaf mute being used in the literacy column. So there's an assumption on the part of the person filling in this form that the person well,



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they obviously can't read and write, they're a deaf mute. Well actually, hold on a second, what about the women that were working in institutions? If they were educated,

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they may well have been. How did the deaf women in these institutions communicate, surely it must have been in writing at times. So we lose some of this information because of the way these census forms were filled out.

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85 % of the deaf women in Dublin weren't married in 1911. And again, I think that's to do with the fact that they were institutionalized and they were separate from men. The Church of Ireland deaf community was very mixed.

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Men and women mixed socially, whereas they were separated. Now there were some marriages between deaf Catholics obviously. Patrick McCrory is the name of a one deaf man who lived in Dorset Street.

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He was married to a deaf woman and he's an example but most deaf women as you can see from this pie chart were unmarried. So this is This is a point I've already talked about.

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This institutionalization that we've seen among deaf women. One thing I will say is that this isn't the case anymore in 2024. Obviously hearing women were institutionalized too,

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but you might have quite low percentages of those hearing women. The percentages of the deaf community and deaf women are sometimes four or five more times more in terms of institutionalisation.

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So this is where I've got my information for this discussion this evening, if you wanted to follow up any of those points. And I just wanted to say thank you,

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actually sorry, I'll go back here. I wanted to say thank you first of all to Dr. Leonard for his contributions, the Deaf Heritage Center,

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and also the St. Mary's Deaf Heritage Group. So those three thank you's are in order. Okay, so I'm going to stop signing for a while and over to you for questions and answers.