

# Sir Bert Massie

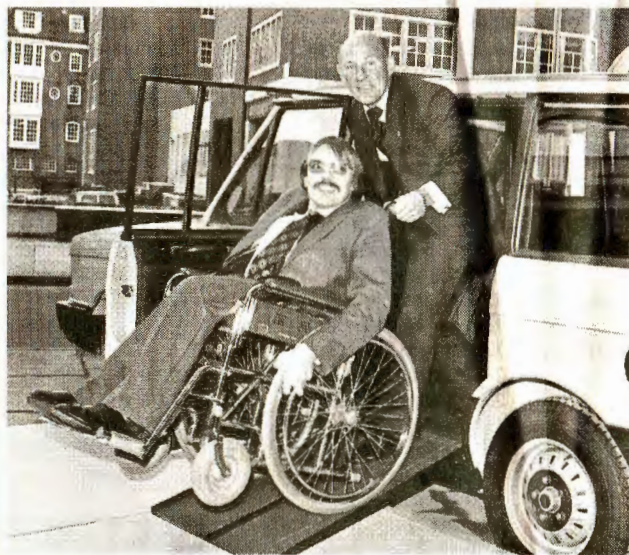
## Wheelchair user whose experiences spurred him to become a leading disability rights campaigner

**S**IR BERT MASSIE, who has died aged 68, was told by a careers officer at the age of 16 that, as a wheelchair user, he was unemployable; he went on to crusade for a better deal for disabled people, serving as chief executive of the charity Radar for 11 years, and as the first and only chairman of the Disability Rights Commission from 2000 to 2007.

Herbert William Massie was born in Liverpool on March 31 1949. He contracted polio in infancy and spent his first five years in Alder Hey Children's Hospital. At five, he was sent to the Children's School of Rest and Recovery, a boarding school where, as he recalled, "nobody rested and nobody recovered. You saw your folks for just two hours every second Sunday." At 11, he moved to Sandfield Park Special School, leaving at 16 with no qualifications: "Special schools were deemed a success if you were still alive when you came out. A lot of my friends died along the way."

Though dismissed by the school careers officer as unemployable, he was assessed at a rehabilitation centre as bright enough to work in an office. After doing a course in Mansfield he returned to Liverpool and found jobs working as a bookkeeper and in credit control.

By now in his early twenties, he wanted to go to night school, but his disability meant he could not get up



Massie, with the former motor racing driver Stirling Moss, demonstrating a new taxi prototype in 1981

the steps to the school. He finally sat his O-Levels after receiving private tuition in the evenings from nuns involved with the Liverpool Association for Disabled People. He went on to take three A-Levels followed by a degree at Liverpool Polytechnic and a postgraduate degree in social work at Manchester.

Massie had first become active in disability rights in the 1960s when he joined the campaign to get rid of the invalid car. In the early 1970s he joined the Liverpool Association for Disabled People and became involved in

running a club for young disabled people.

The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 had given new rights such as parking badges, but there was a long way to go. "It was quite normal to be turned away from cinemas and restaurants," he recalled. "And as for transport, forget it. If you took the train, you'd end up in the guard's van."

Moving to London, Massie began work with the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (Radar) in 1978, serving as chief executive from 1990 to 1999. He was a driving force behind the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA, now replaced by the Equality Act 2010), which makes it unlawful to discriminate against people in respect of their disabilities in relation to employment, the provision of goods and services, education and transport. As a member of a disability rights task force, he helped to draft the DDA regulations relating to service providers.

The Act was amended by subsequent legislation including the Disability Rights Commission Act 1999, which replaced the National Disability Council with the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), and of which Massie was appointed chairman. "There isn't a single job in this country that a disabled person could not do," he declared on his appointment. His achievements included pressuring Government to

ensure that buses, taxis and new buildings are accessible by those with a disability.

But he knew from personal experience that there was so much more to be done. Sometimes he was told that a venue where he was due to speak was wheelchair-friendly, only to have to be carried on to the stage. On one occasion he was barred from a flight to Edinburgh because his disabilities were regarded as "a safety risk".

His job at the DRC came to an end in 2007 when its role was transferred to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, but he continued to campaign, serving as governor of Motability, a scheme for disabled drivers, and as a trustee of voluntary organisations. From 2008 to 2011 he was commissioner for The Compact, an agreement designed to improve cooperation between the government and the voluntary sector. He was also a member of the panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector.

A keen amateur historian, Massie was appointed OBE in 1984, advanced to CBE in 2000, and knighted in 2007 for services to disabled people. In April 2014 he was commissioned a Deputy Lieutenant for Merseyside.

He married, in 2007, Maureen Shaw, who survives him.

*Sir Bert Massie, born March 31 1949, died October 15 2017*

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