

DEAF MUSEUMS – EXHIBITION

Lynne Barnes – Luigi Lerosé

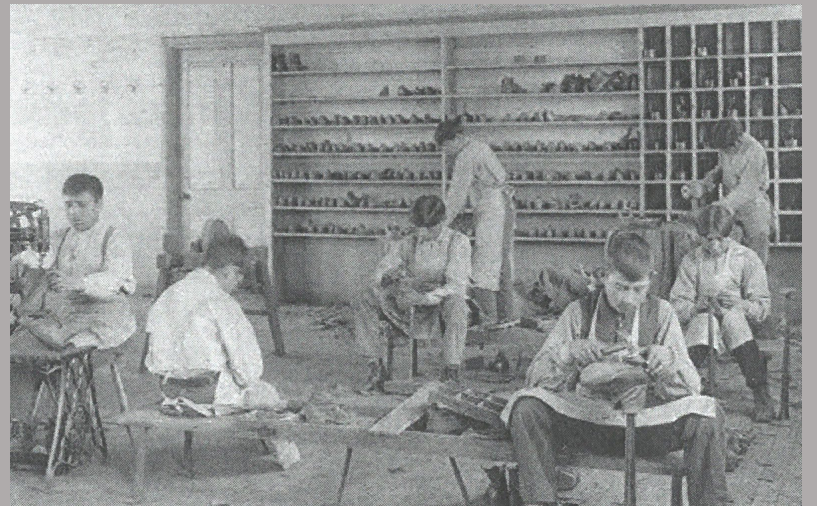
Introduction

This exhibition was created as part of an Erasmus+ project entitled 'Deaf Museums' (www.deafmuseum.eu). Seven European partners have worked together to produce a series of Deaf Exhibitions and to amass a wealth of resources online for anyone thinking of setting up a Deaf Museum or Exhibition. The main Project aim is to preserve Deaf Heritage and Deaf History.

Our exhibition is centred around three themes: Deaf Access, Deaf Place – specifically, the Deaf Workplace and Deaf Space. We have then divided each theme into The Past, The Present and the Future. The idea is to see how Deaf lives were in the past; how they are now and how we envisage them to be in the future.

For the data, we interviewed a wide cross-section of Deaf people and asked them about their Deaf lives. It is interesting to see how the lives of Deaf people have differed over the generations and how different people foresee the future lives of the Deaf community.

To access the exhibition in BSL and to see the signed interviews, please use the QR code.



*Shoemaking, boot repairing class
at the Royal School for Deaf Children, Margate in the 1930s
Image by Peter Jackson*



Deaf manifestants with a BSL interpreter, 1986 – Image by Peter Jackson

Thanks to Peter Jackson for kindly granting permission for the use of the photographic materials, derived from the book: *Snapshots of British Deaf Life in History*, published by British Deaf History Society in 2021.

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ACCESS TO THE HEARING WORLD

Introduction

This exhibition focuses on access for deaf people. In particular it highlights how in the past, deaf people were denied access to the hearing world; there was no independent interpreting profession. In the past deaf people had to rely on family members, Missioners, Welfare Officers, and Social Workers to provide paternalistic support. The advent of the interpreting profession (1970s to the present day) improved independence and broke down some of the barriers for deaf people. Presently new technologies are improving and increasing avenues to access. These technological advances are no doubt going to continue to widen access for deaf people in the future. It remains to be seen if this technology will be a boon or a burden.



Lecture with a BSL interpreter – Photo by UCLan



Deaf person with a missionary
Photo by Mark Heaton

The Past

In the past, access to the hearing world was limited. Deaf people relied on written notes or family members as aids to communication. Deaf clubs which played a huge role in deaf people's lives during 1940s-70s became Missions for the Deaf (Ladd, 2003) and paternalistic 'Missioners' or Welfare Officers began interpreting for deaf people – specifically dealing with general welfare problems (McGilp, 1999). Welfare was something to be done to and for deaf people, rather than being seen as a means for developing the potential of deaf people. More often than not, deaf people relied upon family members to interpret; often their hearing children, who became their bridge to the hearing world (Preston, 1992).

"I left school in 1969. I had absolutely no access to employment. It was truly awful. So, in the face of the barriers to employment I felt I had to go to college and do a course. The level of support at college was again absolutely nothing at all. Again, it was awful and I really struggled... [...] 20 years I worked there and at union meetings, I had no interpreters, no access. Next thing I know is we were going on strike and I had no knowledge of why. Was it low pay? I just wanted information but instead I was given none. I just had to follow the people in front of me when they walked out of the building."

(Mark Heaton)

"Back in the day if I wanted an interpreter, I would use the Welfare Officer. But when the Welfare Officer disappeared it was difficult to find anyone to interpret for me. Sometimes I asked my Mum to come along with me and interpret for me."

(Ian Smith)

"It was really difficult in the work environment because often I had no idea what was going on. I knew that I was missing a lot of information. We would have to revert to writing things down on paper, but they didn't like having to do it."

(Chris Steel)

"I worked in a hearing company for 22 years and I had absolutely no access to information in all that time. I would have to lip read as best I could. The first time I ever used an interpreter was when I started working for the BDA and I remember at the time thinking, 'What is an interpreter?' I had no idea."

(Peter Jackson)



ACCESS TO THE HEARING WORLD

The Present

There are currently 1395 registered sign language interpreters in the UK, with an additional 31 sign language translators (NRCPD, 2022). On the face of it, access has improved considerably since the days of the Missions. Sign language interpreters and translators have a regulatory body and occupational standards are adhered to in order to ‘protect deaf and deafblind people and maintain public confidence in language services across the UK’ (NRCPD, 2022). However, it is still clear, that despite legislation, and greater numbers of interpreters in the public sector, in education and in the media, deaf people are still not gaining full access. Access to Health Services are still fraught with barriers; ‘Deaf people have poorer access to health services, poorer communication in consultations, and poorer access to health information’ (SignHealth, 2014).



Tutor-student conversation with a BSL interpreter – Photo by UCLan



Sign Language lecture with a BSL interpreter – Photo by UCLan

One only has to witness the ‘Where is the Interpreter?’ campaign which was founded during the pandemic in response to a lack of interpreted news bulletins regarding Covid-19 to see how far deaf people have yet to come to gain full access.

“From when I left school to how things are today is a huge difference. Now there is so much access. In one respect that is an improvement, but it is far from perfect. We still have lots of barriers to information. For example, at hospitals and at GP practices there are still barriers. It will take a long time for it to be resolved.”

(Mark Heaton)

“But my Doctor is very good. They will communicate with me writing things down on paper. If it’s a more serious issue, then they will call in an interpreter. Access is certainly better than it was but it’s not a 100%. Some shops and some staff have awareness but then there are other shops where you ask for a paper and pen to write things down and they don’t seem interested. I recall on one occasion I went into a shop and the staff member started speaking into their phone and was using speech to text software, firstly I couldn’t read it because it was way too fast and secondly when it came to answering I couldn’t answer them. So, the software may have been all well and good but how was I supposed to answer. It was a waste of time.”

(Maureen Jackson)

“At the Doctor’s it was just me writing everything down on with a paper and pen, that’s how we communicated. But the doctor would only do that for a minute or two. I remember sitting there thinking how hearing people were in with the doctor for 15 minutes, but when it was my turn it was literally a minute or two max. There was never the use of an interpreter.”

(Chris Steel)

“It was the same when I would try to get on a bus. Some of the drivers had no patience with me at all. I would like to see everyone learning BSL.”

(Ian Smith)



ACCESS TO THE HEARING WORLD

The Future

We now live in a world where technology has a huge influence on how we live our lives and technology has made our lives far better than before. For example, when wanting to watch a movie we have progressed from VHS cassettes to DVD discs to now a time where we need no hardware as everything is streamed to our devices. Similarly, our lives have been changed with technological advancements in communication (Keating and Mirus, 2014). Now we can communicate with people over huge distances and across various time zones. Now we can communicate using various platforms such as Zoom, MS Teams and other software in order to communicate virtually with each other. These various platforms will inevitably and constantly evolve in the future. Now we can utilise VRS (Virtual Relay Service) to access live interpreters on our hand held devices whereas in the past we would have needed the interpreter to travel and be physically present in the space or carry a huge computer to process the data. Organisations and businesses are now researching how interpreting can be provided virtually using computer generated models such as avatars.



Avatar Sign Language Interpreter – Image by equalizent

“I do feel it’s a remote possibility that technology will take over in the future. To the point where I think face to face interaction will be much less and we will be communicating remotely. It’s possible that spaceships will be used to send down avatars or holograms of people. You look at what Virtual Reality (VR) can do and anything is possible.”

(John Vare)

“I think in the future we will have phones that can project 3D images in front of us and when we meet someone who speaks they will be able to automatically interpret for anyone using our phones.”

(David Ellington)

“I think in the future we may very well be using digital holograms as interpreters.”

(Ricci Collins)

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DEAF PLACE: WORK

Introduction

This part of our exhibition explores what we have entitled 'Deaf Place'. Our definition of place considers 'place' as location. These places are where everyday life is situated (Merrifield, 1993 cited in O'Brien et al., 2019). In particular we wanted to capture Deaf people in their workplace. Where did Deaf people work in the past? Did they have high powered jobs? Were they hidden in the shadows? Where were Deaf people seen? Perhaps more importantly, has this now changed? Where are Deaf people employed nowadays? Have Deaf people become more visible? Furthermore, what will employability for Deaf people look like in the future?



The tailoring department – Image by Peter Jackson

Most Deaf people back then would work as tailors or carpenters. There were a few joiners and sewing machinists; simple jobs, that's what it was like back then.

(Chris Steel)

"My job? I worked in one factory then another and then in a care home. Then I worked at an outreach project with a Deaf organisation on a 4 year contract - going out to old people, researching, visiting deaf people in hospital with mental health issues. I loved that job, it was very interesting but when the 4 years were up, the job ended. I then became a Sign Language teacher. I enjoyed that for 22 years. I'm retired now."

(Maureen Jackson)

"Before I worked in a factory, which was ok. I worked there with three Deaf friends; everyone else was hearing which made communication difficult as there were a lot of staff. I had previously worked in an office, where I was on my own and I felt very alone with nobody to communicate with. I felt my confidence drop as a result, so I left. I was quite lucky as I've mostly worked with other Deaf people and there have been no problems.

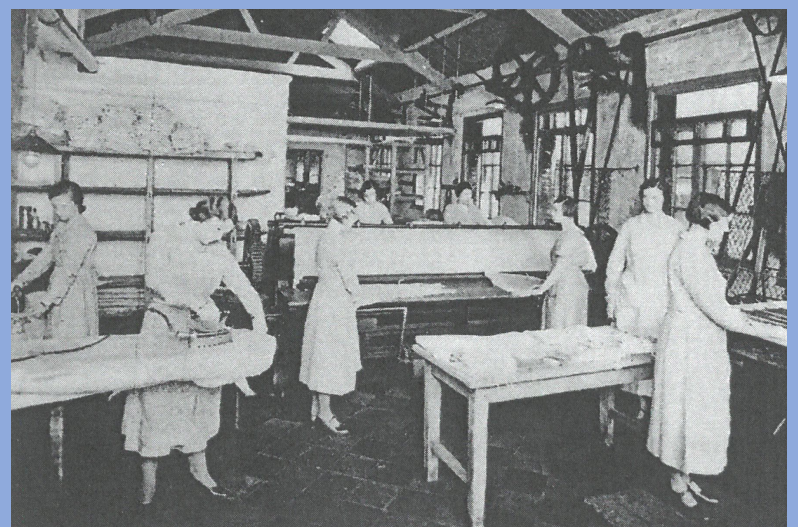
(Shirley Whiteside)

"I worked for three years as a weaving machinist, making things. I then moved into engineering for twenty years. When that shut down, I became a post man. This was one of the best jobs I ever had, as I was on my own walking around and there was nobody to stop me and ask things while I went from house to house. This was the best job; I did this for 20 years.

(Ian Smith)

The Past

In the past, Missions and Missioners to the Deaf trained Deaf people in a range of manual skill to enable them to acquire a trade (Atherton, 2021). In the time of industrialisation Deaf people easily found employment in the new factories and mills. They also worked as joiners, shoemakers, stonemasons and tailors (ibid). Unfortunately, after industrialisation, Deaf people appear to have largely remained in manual jobs, often behind the scenes, hampered by a lack of communication, a lack of deaf awareness and a lack of support.



The laundry department – Image by Peter Jackson

DEAF PLACE: WORK

The Present

Nowadays, employability is arguably better for deaf people, as a far wider range of jobs appear to be open to them. However, it is evident from research that deaf and hard of hearing people generally experience more unemployment, are often underemployed and have lower incomes than the hearing population (RNID, 2006; Winn, 2007; The Papworth Trust, 2014; The Scottish Government, 2015). It is interesting to note that rather than struggle in hearing work-environments many Deaf people want to find employment within the Deaf community/industry or become self-employed; many of them as Sign Language Teachers (Barnes, 2017).

“Now, Deaf people have better jobs today. My son is Deaf, he has a really good high level job, and has worked his way up. I couldn’t do that when I was working, I was stuck at the bottom. So, things are better.

(Ian Smith)



*Paul M. Flechter – Deaf Priest
Photo by himself*



*Mark Wheatley – Executive Director of European Union of the Deaf
Photos & Images by EUD*

“Now there are better jobs, because Sign Language has been taught for some time and has started to spread. I wouldn’t know what other jobs there are as I retired 12 years ago. In terms of the future, I wish the best for them.”

(Maureen Jackson)

“Well, my first job I was a painter. If someone needed some work done, they’d get in touch and then I’d go with someone during the day or evening, whenever they were available, to discuss what they needed. I’d then go by myself and start working. Conversation while on the job was fine, customers would use different gestures for tea and biscuits. Importantly conversation was always about work and the job, it was very rarely a general conversation.

(David Bamber)

Now things have changed, I can see many Deaf people doing very well in their working lives; some are CEOs, some are slowly working their way up within a company and some own their own business like SignLive. These are all good role models for young Deaf people to look up to.

(Ricci Collins)



DEAF PLACE: WORK

The Future

With the continuous improvements in technology and increasing numbers of registered and regulated interpreters to enable greater access, the future looks brighter for Deaf people. What remains a challenge is educating people, both Deaf and hearing, that Deaf people 'can'. Hearing employers need to look past the deficit model of deafness and embrace the wonders of technology. Hearing employers and Deaf people themselves, need to embrace 'Deaf Gain' (Bauman & Murray, 2014). They need to be open to and mindful of the benefits, contributions and advances that arise from the Deaf ways of being (ibid).

"I think in the future Deaf people will do well in terms of the jobs they do, especially with the improvements in technology and with better availability of interpreters. With the pool of [Deaf] professionals growing, I can't see any problems, I think things will continue to get better. Some Deaf people may well need reminding and encouraging that they 'can'. The internalisation of 'I can't', needs resolving.

(John Vare)

"In the future, we may well have a Deaf PM. We have already had a Deaf MP - it was however a short span in office. Similarly we have had people in council positions, but they've equally been short lived too. We need to continue increasing the scope of the positions Deaf people are in. I'd love to see a Deaf doctor potentially in a high-profile job in science for the government, or someone in MI5, a spy, I don't see why not.

(Ricci Collins)

"Of course, I believe Deaf people will achieve more in the future and can achieve whatever's in their heart or dreams. They need to be told they will achieve, just as hearing children are. I don't see why Deaf children cannot achieve the things that their hearing peers can, they should never say they cannot, because they can. A Deaf person could be a doctor, a dentist, an English teacher, any professional role, they can do any role they want, never stop dreaming, remember that.

(Ola Bolinska)

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DEAF SPACE

Introduction

The desire to take possession of space is deeply embedded in Deaf culture (Bauman & Joseph, 2014). Deaf people want a space where they can call 'home' (ibid, p375). Deaf Space is often seen as the Deaf club or the temporary Deaf spaces which form when signing Deaf people meet in the street or in a bar (Gulliver & Kitzel, 2016, p. 451 cited in O'Brien et al., 2019). There are very few 'spaces' Deaf people can call their own. The Deaf community has traditionally been based around a strong network of Deaf clubs and residential schools for the deaf which were incredibly important for the transmission of Deaf culture and values (Ladd, 2003); spaces where Deaf people could 'escape the oppressive oralism of hearing society' (Valentine & Skelton, 2008). However, recent times have seen the closure of many Deaf clubs and schools for the deaf (Ladd, 2003). Improvements in technology and the widespread use of the internet is now revolutionising communication for the Deaf community. Is it now time to talk about an on-line Deaf community space?



Deaf Club, 1918-1920 – Image by Peter Jackson

In the past things were great! I'd regularly go to Bristol Deaf club which was a Deaf space with everyone using Sign Language. You'd see older Deaf people there too who would have a rich knowledge of Deaf history. This was in the 90s, the Deaf social scene there was strong and vibrant. I'd attend regularly on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. We'd play pool, darts, bowls and a wide variety of other games. There was also bingo for the older generations. I was always involved in football and would talk about this for hours there."

(David Ellington)

"The Deaf club was where I learnt most of my Sign Language as the signing there was different from school. School had a limited vocabulary, but the club had a much wider breadth of Sign Language being used there. I would watch the older Deaf generations signing and learn more language and comprehension. I wasn't taught formally at all; it all came naturally and developed within me as I learned."

(Chris Steel)

"I'd go to the Deaf club in Chester regularly, every Saturday and Sunday would be bowling, and Wednesday would be Deaf club."

(Maureen Jackson)

"I was also a member of the BDA, at the weekend there would be mime and drama workshops; the BDA is how I connected and met with other Deaf people. These weekends were so important for me. On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday everyone would be signing to one another; when the weekend was over, I'd go back to work on Monday feeling uplifted and reinvigorated because of the weekend. On the Monday I'd be back with hearing people, they would all be talking, and I wouldn't know what they were discussing, so I would get on with work. By Friday I'd feel deflated and flat but then I would see all my Deaf friends and feel great again. The Deaf community was so important and useful as you'd learn so much and broaden your horizons."

(Mark Heaton)

The Past

In the past, Deaf clubs were the epicentre of the Deaf community; spaces which provided the bond of belonging and collective identity. They were spaces for information exchange, co-operation and mutual support between Deaf people (Valentine & Skelton, 2008). Deaf clubs also provided a geographical base for shared leisure and sport activities; in short, a rewarding social life that was largely absent outside of the club.



A party at a Deaf Club, 1911 – Image by Melinda N. Napier

DEAF SPACE

The Present

The ways in which Deaf people previously engaged with the Deaf club is now largely consigned to history. Younger Deaf people still socialise with each other and take part in shared leisure activities, but they do so in ways that are radically and fundamentally different from earlier generations (Atherton, 2012). Deaf pubs and Deaf cafes have emerged. In addition, the internet has offered Deaf people an alternative way to access information and to communicate with each other in sign language without the need to be in the same space at the same time (Valentine & Skelton, 2008).



An event – Photo by Jakob Dalbjorn – www.unsplash.com



Pub gathering – Photo by Victor Clime – www.unsplash.com

“Now, there has been a reduction (in Deaf clubs) which is bad. This is due to social media with Deaf people using their phones. In the past, there were some new technologies to help communication like the fax machine – but this didn’t have the impact platforms like Facebook have, before this there was Bebo; we also have Twitter now too. Some older Deaf people are still committed to attending the Deaf club for activities like bingo. People aged 30-40 are few and far between as they often have family commitments. The younger groups of Deaf people are nowhere to be seen, they’re in closed groups away from the Deaf club.

(David Ellington)

“With Deaf clubs, the social scene has moved to Deaf pubs or cafés. The Deaf club is good for older Deaf people, as they are easy to access. Younger Deaf people like to be out and about, going to different pubs or clubs and being active. ”

(John Vare)

“Some Deaf people have groups that go to different events together and organise to meet at specific places should they miss one another at one gathering. Some video call one another, others are part of Facebook groups and have conversations via video call. Some Deaf people go on holiday together, others work with Deaf people and socialise there or at conferences. Deaf people meet everywhere.»

(Ricci Collins)



Conversation with friends via videocall – Photo by UCLan

DEAF SPACE

The Future

Technology has clearly changed the scope of Deaf community life. However, whilst the venues might have changed, the reasons for coming together as a community remain largely the same (Atherton, 2012). The future opens up exciting possibilities for the Deaf community. The space of the Deaf club is evolving (Valentine & Skelton, 2008). The internet enables Deaf people share information about Deaf events and meetings. The internet is extending Deaf people's networks, enabling them to meet new contacts, many of whom may live further afield than the local Deaf community. The world is getting smaller, communication much quicker and international and global networks a reality.



Conversation on a video platform – Photo by DeafMuseums

“Looking forward to the future, I believe there will continue to be smaller groups of Deaf people but with a Deaf hub, where people will be able to go to with any problems or if in need of any support for social and welfare needs; anything that may help with preparing for their future. I think one-off events where people come together to discuss issues or special events regarding film or art, I think a wide range of people would attend that.”

(David Ellington)

“In the future Deaf clubs and centres may well close but Deaf people will still come together, as Deaf people can get in touch with text and meet on activities like walking, going on holiday together, finding a community centre or potentially a pub, which would be better than nothing. Deaf people will always meet and I believe this will continue long into the future. The difference will be that there won't be a fixed place to meet.

(Mark Heaton)

“Thinking of the future, as we know technology is always changing. I think this means there will be more video calling, thinking ahead will we be calling via hologram? If you remember the programme Star Trek they would always communicate via this way in 3D! So, if I had a friend that lived in Australia rather than video calling it would be via a hologram and it would be as though they were here! In the future transport could be much faster making it easy to meet people wherever they are, going to Australia and then America in short succession.

(Ricci Collins)

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