



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

John Newton
Interviewed by Andrew Goodwin

British Library ref. C1345/16

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Interviewee's surname: Newton

Title:

Interviewee's forename: John

Sex: Male

Occupation:

Date and place of birth: 1938, Harrogate

Date(s) of recording: 14th December 2008

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Name of interviewer: Andrew Goodwin

Speech to Text reporter: Laura Harrison

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[Track 1]

This is Andrew Goodwin, interviewing John Newton, on Sunday 14th of December 2008, for the Unheard Voices Project in Cheshire, Chester. The speech-to-text reporter is Laura. I am going to ask the Interviewee to introduce himself please. What is your full name?

I am John Newton and I was born in Harrogate, Yorkshire, on 22nd January 1938. My Mum, what did my mum do? She worked in shops mostly. My Dad was a builder, a brick layer by trade.

Yes, that is in the introduction bit. If we can start off with some sort of basic information. For example, can you tell me a bit about your childhood? You mentioned your father was a brick layer, what sort of life was that for you?

That is a very, very open question! Well, in general, my recollection of childhood was a very happy time. Although we were quite poor, I never had any, erm, what is the word? I never had any feelings at all when I was a youngster. We lived in a council house in a very small council estate: very respectable. People cut their hedges and things and cultivated their gardens. My Dad was away, of course, until I was about eight. Well, mostly away: he was not in the Forces but he was working in various civil engineering projects around the country and coming home at weekends and sometimes not for very long. When he was working in Scotland, he was only home like once every six weeks or so.

That must have been quite hard not seeing your father very often?

Well it didn't seem so at the time [Laughs]. I mean, I got on extremely well with my father generally when he was there. After the war, of course, he was there all the time. In fact, I suppose, in a way, I was more friendly with my Dad than with my mother; not quite sure why.

Any brothers or sisters?

Yes, I have two older sisters. One significant thing perhaps is that I had polio when I was an infant, when I was about two, and it's only occurred to me quite recently that might have been a

cause of my deafness - excuse me, I've got a... - my sisters remember it, and I have no recollection of it.

That was at how old?

Well, as an infant, two years old or may be a bit less.

Did you get well quite quickly?

I don't know! [Laughs] My sister had to go and stay with her grandparents because of the risk of infection; that was my chief recollection of it, staying with grandma and grandpa I had a thin leg, I remember that, until I was about ten or eleven, but that is my only recollection of it. But it could very well have led to my deafness.

What about school? What can you tell me about your school?

Well, I went to Bilton Grange Primary school which is literally around the corner, until I was about eleven. It was the same school my sisters went to.

I was quite a bright lad and usually top of the class, mostly. I think I was a bit, erm, of a cheeky little lad as well. I got on very well with some teachers, and not very well with others, you know. But, again, my recollection of school was perfectly happy and that was in the days you just walked to school. You know, the streets were not considered to be dangerous or anything. Anyway, it was only literally about two hundred yards, the school, from where we lived.

That sounds good. So what can you tell me about the neighbourhood or even your own home, what sort of house did you live in?

Warren Place is erm...well Harrogate is a middle class sort of dormitory town; it hasn't changed its character since I was there, but it's changed quite a bit now. We lived about a mile, or a mile or so from the town centre and the edge of the town is a bit further out now. I mean, we used to get a bus into town but if the bus didn't come or you got fed up with waiting, we used to quite often walk in to town. I actually drove past there just a couple of weeks ago, passed the school which is still there. That is about it.

Okay. What can you tell me about the home you lived in?

My home?

Yes, did you...?

I think I was not aware of it. But my big sister, Chris, who is dead now, was nine when I was born and my middle sister, Sheila, was five or something and I think for my big sister, Chris, it was like having a live doll: it must have been wonderful for her! She used to take me out for walks in my pram and everything. I am trying to think of a neighbour, and I remember we were close to the neighbours on the right, Mrs Walker, and she had a daughter called Margaret, who was the same age as my sister Chris and they were very close. If my parents were out, like my Mum was at a cinema or something, when there was an air raid warning, I used to go to Mrs Walker and I sat under the stairs. Harrogate never suffered any bombing at all; we had quite frequent warning but no actual raids.

[08:01]

May I ask why you had to go next door?

Why? Because my Mum was away, and those were our instructions. Presumably it was only when my Mum was out which would not be very often; people didn't go out very often in those days but she probably went the cinema or something. She was a big cinema fan because she grew up at the time the cinema started really. And, before she was married, she was a cashier and there were five cinemas in Harrogate then and she was a cashier in one of the cinemas. It was quite a glamorous job in those days, you know! She was always keen on particularly the early things that started in the twenties, Chaplin and Buster Keaton. Sorry, I can't remember the name of the women, but that era when Hollywood started really, that was really when... The cinema started around the turn of the century but it really got off the ground in the twenties, when it moved to Hollywood.

Are you a big fan of the movies? [Repeated].

I am not a knowledgeable fan. I have a niece, Gillian, who is a film-maker and, like a lot of film-makers, she works mostly for television but, like a lot of such people, she is a real film buff; goes to the specialised cinemas and knows everything, but I am not like that, I just like watching movies.

So, did you go to the cinema much when you were a little kid?

Well, yes, I mean it was a major entertainment, remember then. I can't actually remember what happened during the week; I suspect we didn't often go during the week because we wouldn't be allowed to. We used to have Saturday matinees at the Odeon cinema just for children on Saturday morning. Have you heard about those?

Oh, yes.

That was regular. I used to go there every Saturday morning.

Start throwing popcorn at other people!

Sorry? We didn't have pop corn in those days [Laughs]. I remember it was quite rowdy and it used to annoy me sometimes when the cowboys and goodies came on and everyone cheers and the baddies went on and everybody boo-ed. I am trying to remember the one: I remember Flash Gordon which was a serial, and quite a few were serials and Flash Gordon was some sort of space man. I have seen stills of those films since and they looked incredibly crude: they are black and white for a start. But that' one I remember. There was a very popular cowboy film but I can't remember the name of it. You saw an episode every Saturday morning. And then, if I went in the evening it would have been with my sisters. When I was six or seven, they would be in their teens, you see.

Did they not go with you to the matinees?

No, no, that was another interesting thing, for things like that, you went on your own; you were not regarded as needing an escort or anything. Quite small kids used to, you know, go out on their own and go to the shops for Mum and stuff like that, which you would not allow them to

do nowadays. Ride your bike - when I was ten, my parents moved from one side of the town to the other and because I had only six months to do at my Primary school, I stayed at the same school for obvious reasons, and cycled from one side of Harrogate to the other for six months, aged ten - and you would like not a kid to do that now, would you!

I am sure that kept you fit.

Yes, it was hard work as well because it was up and down [Laughs].

[12:52]

Okay, so, we move on now to your sort of secondary education. As your Dad was a brick layer, what sort of things did you study?

I went to a local grammar school and got a scholarship. I got what you call the eleven plus, it was called a scholarship. I passed the scholarship and went to the grammar school. It was just the one in Harrogate. I think, at the time, about ten per cent of the primary population went to grammar school. In the class I was in, when I started, there was about may be three or four artisan's kids out of about thirty, so predominantly lower middle-class basically, not so many artisans. But my Dad was never a typical artisan: his schooling was during world war one, and was very curtailed: a lot of the kids were then. So I finished up at the grammar school. People get really nostalgic about grammar school. Considering the intake, which most headmasters nowadays would die for. I thought they did an absolutely terrible job [Laughs]. There was a lot of snobbery and one or two of the teachers were stinking snobs; they used to bull me up for my broad Yorkshire vowels and things, not just pulled up, but made fun of. I remember one guy in our class, Chris Harrison, definitely the brightest bloke they probably had in the school for yonks and who came from a farm at Nidderdale and he spoke with a broad Yorkshire accent and they used to give him absolute hell for his Yorkshire accent: he was an absolute scholar, top of everything! So I don't rate my grammar school very highly but I recognise by going there that changed my life because it changed me in to a white-collar worker rather than an artisan.

So what sort of job did you go into then when you left school?

I studied engineering at Manchester University first, electrical engineering, and I worked for 10 years in the electrical engineering industry. Then I moved to a metallurgical company when I was thirty. An international aluminium company and I worked for them for the next twenty years but I had to pack it up because of my deafness.

What did you actually do in that company?

I started off as a marketing specialist. That is why I got the job because they wanted somebody with an engineering background because obviously the metals they used a lot in engineering. Then I transferred fairly quickly to what they now call human relations; it was called personnel then. I think my most productive times were in personnel really. It was during the Thatcher years and it was very difficult; lots of changes, and factories closing down; people being made redundant and having to be retrained. It was quite a difficult time.

Did you enjoy it though? [Repeated].

Yes, generally I think I did. I mean, probably too much. I was not ambitious enough really and I never got far. I think I was too tied-up in the job to sort of play the politics, which you need to do in a big company. I mean, if you want to get on in a big company, you really have to get in tune with the politics, and I am not using that in a derogatory sense, but with the power structure and I was not very good at that, which I regret to a certain extent. But, I mean, they paid me a reasonable salary for twenty years, and most of the time I enjoyed myself [Laughs].

You got job satisfaction then?

Yes, yes, quite a bit of it.

[18:10]

Good. Okay, you mentioned briefly then you had to stop work because of your deafness?

Yes.

Would you like to tell me about that?

Well, like most multi-nationals, when you get to a certain high level of management, you tend to move about: you do a job for three or four years and move to another one. I moved generally for about two or three years, and, then, when my last job finished, I think if it had not been for the recession, I might have moved on to another job but there was no other job available and my hearing was causing me more and more problems, particularly using the phone. So I think, in a way, I probably left work earlier than I might have done, if it had not been for the recession. The numbers of people in the company in the United Kingdom had reduced by half over that time, which is a big reduction.

So we are talking about the late eighties here?

Erm, well, just this year I have been retired for twenty years, so yes it must have been 1988, yes August 1988 when I packed that up.

So, was that the moment you realised your hearing had gotten too bad, or was that the first time you realised you had a hearing loss?

My twenties was the problem. I was originally diagnosed when I was at University, you see, with a high frequency hearing loss. Obviously it declined gradually over a long period. I have a feeling it was exacerbated by noise on a couple of occasions. I mean, I remember I did discuss two jobs. I went to see the Chief Executive of two subsidiary companies. In fact, it became fairly clear with one of them that the guy was just going through the motions any way because my functional boss didn't want me to be suing them for unfair dismissal, because they knew I knew all about unfair dismissal! And I had my own doubts about joining a new group of people because, of course, if you are with people you know, it's easier than when you are deaf; it's easier than finding a completely fresh group. So I think I had my own doubts. So, I was not too unhappy about the outcome.

Can you pretend that I don't know anything about what it is like being deaf. Would you like to describe why it's easier being with a group of people you know?

Good question. People get used to you. Of course they know it's hard to talk to somebody in the next room, that's part of it. When you feel more comfortable with people, you are more comfortable about asking them to repeat themselves like, "Sorry I didn't hear you: I am deaf,"

or something. I am talking about twenty years ago; I don't know what it's like now. But, twenty years now, our management level in a company like that, there was not much sympathy around for problems, personal problems. You know, personal problems was something you had at home.

Yes.

I hope its more... It's better now. I mean if I was Chief Executive of that company now I would be saying to people we can't afford to lose John Newton's services and pay him a pension for the next twenty years, make some of the necessary changes so we can keep him for another five years, you know! [Laughs]. It wasn't the case then. So, yes, I think it's the fact that people get to know you more, and when you are working with a group of people who you get on with reasonable well, you are friendly with, you are more relaxed with them and less exposed with your personal defects or anything. That is what I would say.

[23:02]

Yes, good point, thank you. So you first started realising you had a hearing loss when you were at University?

Yes, erm, well, no. That is not quite true really. My mother used to say I was inattentive. She used to say I was daft!

Don't all mothers say the same thing?! [Laughs]

A couple of times I got taken to the local GP and he would turn me around at the corner facing the wall and whisper things to you and look at your ears and say, "you should have them syringed out". It was a very crude business really. The first time I actually had a proper audiology test was when I got to Manchester University because I found I couldn't chat up the girls for dances on a Saturday night in the noisy atmosphere of the Students' Union.

You could not quite follow what people were saying then?

Well, it was particular that no-one noticed it particularly with these noisy dances - what do you call them now?

Discos?

Yes, discos. Yes. Mostly it was live bands in the Students' Union. I mean, I could not hold a conversation in a noisy atmosphere so I went to the student medical centre and they gave me an audiogram you know and told me about my high frequency hearing, which was poor.

So that was when I was diagnosed. I didn't have a hearing-aids or anything; I don't think it was considered necessary.

Can you describe how the tests went? What did you have to do?

I can't remember: I remember the facts but I can't remember the detail. It's the Students' Union building, it's the same one, and the cochlear implant clinic is immediately behind it [Laughs]. But I just have a vague recollection of the student medical centre but I can't remember anything else.

So is it fair to say that the first time you noticed there was a significant loss was at University?

Yes.

So, would it be a gradual loss from then on?

Yes, when I was about forty I was persuaded to try a hearing-aid by a private hearing-aid supplier. But, my conclusion was, after quite a bit of messing about and trying different ones and having trouble with feedback, I decided it was not worth it because I didn't really have a big problem then; I was still able to use the telephone and talk to people, and I was even singing in a choir. In fact, one of the reasons I joined the choir - I have always been interested in music - but one of the reasons I joined the choir was I thought it would be good for my speech, because obviously this was quite an up-market choir, the Birmingham Bach Choir that basically sings baroque music where the words are quite important, and you are singing in German and Latin and English, you see. I thought that would be good for my diction.

And was it?

Oh yes, it was a great experience really, a big cultural experience. I did that for ten years and, then, I packed it in really because I knew my hearing was getting worse and I knew if I did not resign, they would kick me out [Laughs]. So... In a good choir, you know a choir that believes in quality, you have to have an audition every year, you know. The choir was amateur but we used to play with a professional orchestra and there would be old guys stalwart members of the choir for thirty years and you would get kicked out without a thought! That is the only way good choirs keep up the standard, you see, we had a very meticulous Musical Director.

How long ago was it that you left?

At about the same time...no, I kept it up before I finished work because the last job I had was in Swansea. But the choir was in Birmingham, so it must have been before I went to Swansea so that would be about '85 or '86 probably?

[28:45]

This is great. So, it's interesting that you are trying to do something to help with your diction, and you are becoming aware of it. I have never heard of anybody joining a choir before. What did your friends and family think when you joined the Choir?

My wife used to come to concerts; it was an amateur concert so generally you would do one performance, sometimes two. It was a big event; we used to go out for a nice meal afterwards. I don't think my kids took much interest in it, to be honest. My other family members, my sisters, they were living in different parts of country, you know. I don't think it had much impact on my family: we used to have one rehearsal a week, and then about four or five concerts a year. I used to have to get dressed up in a black dinner jacket and tie, and we used to go to a very nice Indian restaurant as well in Birmingham afterwards.

Sounds lovely. Tell me more about your wife and children. How many children do you have?

Two kids: Simon is the eldest, eighteen months older than my Emma. What can I tell you? They are getting towards middle age now. Simon must be 44, poor lad. Emma must be 42.

Emma is a teacher and married. She has no kids and not likely to have any now. Simon is self-employed, a business consultant, and keen sailor, with one kid and they're not able to have any others. My only granddaughter, Flo is 14.

Wife?

Sheila. I am divorced from my first wife. She was a teacher, too. In fact, she was a teacher and then a head teacher and then became - what do they call them? Inspector, you know?

Oh, yes.

I'm trying to remember the name of the education inspectorate. We were at school together, my wife and I, and then she was a bit of a late starter. She did her two year teacher training course, a normal one, mainly because she got a place offered in London and she wanted to go to London! But then, subsequently, she did an Open University degree and then she did another degree at Birmingham University as a mature student. So, she sort of late-developed and did very well in her career. I mean, we were sort of childhood sweet-hearts really. Well, we were at school together anyway [Laughs].

And your second wife?

June. Well that was a mistake really! I actually met June through another very, very, very old friend who lives in France, who I was at University with. She was one of about four people that I've kept in touch with ever since we were at University together. I was, it was not long after being divorced. My first break-up with my first wife was very traumatic; people do not talk about it very much and when they do they do not necessarily tell you very much about the trauma, and some of the trauma you don't actually realise until later, you know. So I think my experience for marrying June was that I was not thinking straight! We did not last for very long. What happened? After I left Alcan, I did a bit of consultancy work - what do they call it? Management 'hack' work - doing job evaluations and things like that. I worked for the National Coal Board as a national redundancy counsellor and one of my other friends said "I don't know why you take off over the horizon", because they knew I was interested in sailing. So, that is what I did: I bought a boat and we took off to the Caribbean. That was in '91. Was it '91? '90. About '91 anyway.

Very romantic!

And, I mean, we were only actually together for about eighteen months. Then, we didn't have a traumatic break-up, we just sort of drifted apart really. We were not actually divorced until 2000 but we had been separated for a length of time because we did the trip to the Caribbean, and came back to England in '93. Then in '94, I took off in the boat with a male friend, and set off to the Caribbean and then continued and spent the next five years sailing around the world you see; mostly on my own with various friends joining me from time to time.

[35:22]

Lovely. How did your hearing loss effect your ability to sail?

Well, the main embarrassment is not being able to use the radio; which is not a legal requirement, but it's something people expect you to do! They expect you to be able to do it! And, also, when you are in some strange place, you know, even if you can avoid having to call them up on the radio, the harbour master before you arrive, you have to go and report and have your passport stamped. Usually, there is a lot of bureaucracy, a lot more than when you fly to, on holiday to Spain! You know, you have a big wodge of documents and things. In places like Mexico and South America you need clearance from the customs, harbourmaster, coast guard, port medical officer and one other one - I can't remember the other one. So, there is a lot of bureaucracy.

An amazing amount.

Yes you just have to, sort of, well, I'm not really sure how I coped with that, if I didn't understand, I asked people to write things down. I have been a fairly brash person, that was a help. Your personality does make quite a difference. I never felt particularly apologetic about being deaf [Laughs].

[37:13]

Okay. Well that is really interesting that you do the sailing. Is there anything which you had to give up because of your deafness?

Oh, well, music is one thing. That thing I quite regret especially at this time of year. For me, Christmas is all about music almost. The telephone: which however much I use email and texting, keeping in touch with your family is definitely disabled by not being able to use the telephone. I mean Flo for instance, my granddaughter, I mean I get on fine with her but I am not in contact with her enough because she, unusually for a teenager she's not mad on email, she does not spend half a day on the computer like some do. I miss out on contact with people; especially people I am close to and then my closer friends - because of my life style - are all scattered around the country, you see. My closest male friend, who is not a relative, lives in Portchester and we keep in touch by email but not at the same frequency as we would if we could use the telephone. What else? Well, I think the other thing is what you might call group activities in general: any group activity puts me at a disadvantage immediately. One to one or with two people is fine, but more than two though is a problem. For example, my son is a keen racing sailor. He keeps a boat down in East Cowes, and I go down there occasionally and join him for a weekend, but I can't really participate because there is eight people on the boat and there is absolutely no way I can communicate with eight people. So I just go for the ride and for the scene and so on. I can't really get involved. The other thing is what you might call general community activism.

How did it make you feel knowing you can't participate in either the racing or other activities?

Well, it's depressing really. I feel my life is very much restricted; my life experience is, if you like, smaller and narrower as a result of it.

[40:20]

Do you mind if we go on to when you recognised that you needed to do something about your hearing loss. You mentioned that when you were about 40 when you first tried on a hearing-aid but it was not for you. When did you try a hearing-aid again?

It was when I got from my circumnavigation in about 2000 in Falmouth, and I stayed there for two years, living in my boat. I enrolled for a lip-reading class at some place local, I can't remember, and I got to know some people from a deaf club. Then I think that is what prompted me to do something about my hearing-aid. So, I got my first hearing-aid from Truro hospital.

I took quite a while to convince myself that it was doing me any good actually. One thing I discovered from the lip-reading classes, which I had not realised before, was that I was relatively good at lip-reading. I thought that was quite normal, and I discovered it wasn't. There were people that go deaf who don't get very good at lip-reading. But that rather shocked me. I remember going to the class and there was about 12 of us and the guy I sat next to had been going to the classes for about 2 years, and he hadn't seemed to be able to do much lip-reading at all. I think it may have been something to do with motivation. I mean, my hearing has declined very slowly over a long period, so I have imperceptibly learned to lip reading. But, this guy, with his hearing-aid in, he did not have a huge problem but I think people get encouraged to go to lip-reading classes because it's like a social support thing. At the classes, they take the hearing-aid out, you see. There was a very good teacher who used to finish up each class by telling us a little story but without making any noise! And she did it quite clearly, like a lip speaker. So I could understand 99% of it, but this guy next to me didn't seem to get any of it, you see and then I discovered there were others like that. I met a woman from Truro; a woman suddenly deafened overnight and she was quite a good lip reader but she had had to learn it quite suddenly because for her it was the only solution really! So, I think it's a lot to do with motivation. But I have lost by point now - how did I get to talking about lip reading?

We were talking about when you did need some help and you wanted to try hearing-aids again.

After I got the hearing-aid and I had it for three or four months, I realised it was helping me because I noticed the difference when I switched it off particularly, and I still do with this one [indicates]. Later, I had a second one which I was using until last week, when I got this thing [indicates]

Which is a what?

This [indicates].

What is it?

My cochlear implant you mean? Yes. Before that I had another hearing-aid in my left ear, you see.

People who are listening will not be able to see you [Laughs]. Okay. So you ended up having then two hearing-aids and you got some benefit?

Yes, I was reluctant to get the second hearing aid as well. Yes, I was pressurised by people to have a second hearing-aid as well as I didn't think the additional benefit would justify the additional hassle because I was doing all right with this one, you see [indicates]. They are so anxious to help you, so I felt churlish in refusing them you know, so I agreed to have it.

Who was trying to persuade you to have the second one?

Well, it was a girl in Preston, I think, the senior audiologist who suggested it and when I said, "No" I think she was quite taken aback! They do not normally expect much reaction from their patients, and then I said, I remember now, "Well, I think I would like to see the hearing therapist". That was very disappointing and none of these people suggested I have a cochlear implant, by the way. [Laughs]. That was not very long since I saw the hearing therapist, about a year ago. Then, I was trying to find out about deaf groups and somebody put me on to a deaf social worker who lives in Blackpool. I arranged a meeting with her and she said, "Why don't you consider a cochlear implant?" and I said, "Well, the last time I discussed it with anybody, a long time previously, they told me that it wouldn't restore, I had already got the amount of hearing that the cochlear implant would restore". That might have been true at the time, I don't know.

[46:45]

You say your hearing had deteriorated quite gradually?

Yes it was when I was in Plymouth; it was about fifteen years ago, because it was about when Flo, my grand daughter was born.

So can you tell me how you were feeling at the time? You have managed to circumnavigate the globe quite happily without any help, and then you are attending lip-reading classes and getting hearing-aids etc. Can you tell me about your feelings about receiving this help?

I think, and I try to reflect on the link between my sailing activity and my deafness, and, although I don't normally, erm, support this adventure training argument which you're probably familiar with, you know the idea that it trains your character and stuff like that, I had some experience of adventure training from being a boy scout instructor, and my son was involved in the various outward bound things and so on. I have always been a big outdoors man and I never really subscribed to the view that climbing a mountain or sailing a boat or something makes a big difference to your character. But I do think that the experiences of sailing a small boat and coping with the problems, which they are not usually the sort of problems people imagine, where you have to cope, you know you have no alternative; there is nobody to ask for help or anything! I think it does make you more confident, ultimately.

But how did you feel afterwards when you started going to hearing therapy and lip-reading classes?

I try not to get impatient and I try not to be too brash because, certainly in audiology departments, the patients are quite old, you know, and they are normally dealing with fairly unconfident people. So I try not to be too brash and I try not to sort of force my personality on them. I think that is something that comes with age; it's not a problem when you are older, you know. I had a very interesting experience in hospital when I was having this (indicates cochlear implant) a guy in the next bed to me who was about 40 and there was a guy having an operation on his knee and it was obvious he was quite uncomfortable with the hospital environment. He was delving into his bag all the time and getting things out of his bag and struggling to get into the cupboard, and I felt he could not really relax because he was in a completely different environment and he was finding it unsettling. Then, when he came back from his operation and woke up again, he was in this horrible gown - I don't know if you have any been in hospital - one of these gowns down to here. [indicates]

Yes, very embarrassing.

Yes and paper underpants! And he started struggling to get into his things you know and I know. I said, "Can I help you"? And it transpired what he wanted was his pyjamas, and he wanted to get out of this thing. When you get older you get more relaxed about new situations, you know, possibly through experience. So, I think old age does help in that respect; you are more confident, more self reliant, and you are less easily embarrassed. I have arguments with

bus drivers and I tell them off! The fact that there is a bus full of people that are watching me, doesn't bother me!

[51:24]

Okay. So, at the time you started going for your cochlear implant, what was the reaction from family and friends?

What, to the implant?

Yes.

Well, they sent emails saying "how is it going"? [Laughs] I mean, they all were a bit concerned, my sister and my son particularly, and their expectations might be too high. Remember, it was only last Tuesday when I got switched on. I sent them a couple of progress reports. Anyway, my sister is the sort of person that only checks her email about once every three or four days, but, they hope it's going to make a big difference to me, you see. I am a bit concerned to damp down their expectations to be honest. Remember, I live on my own, so I do not have a big family any way. None of them are very near. The nearest relative is my nephew that lives ten miles a way, just south of Preston, and they keep pestering me with emails saying, "How is it going?" In fact I will probably call in to see them on the way home this afternoon. But a lot of people are saying, "It's great, you know, tell us all about it and stuff" but I am just worried that they might be expecting too much.

But on the whole, what is the - I do not want to say, 'support' - general feeling from your family?

Not brilliant really. I have been living on my own for quite a while now.

Is that because of choice?

Well, not really, no. I would rather like to find a good woman! But it's very difficult when you can't chat them up, you know! I would much rather have a loving partner, but I didn't want the last one. I mean, it didn't bother me when June decided to disappear at all. So, I think that is

probably a lesson, you see. Living with a difficult relationship, to my mind, is a lot less preferable to living on your own. When you live on your own it makes life quite simple but you get lonely, you know. I have got out of the habit of what you call 'immediate and ever-present support'. I am still on myself, basically.

[54:30]

I remember you saying earlier that you did find group situations difficult.

Well, yes, because I can't choose it; that is why.

What is your social life like at the moment?

Not very lively. That is another reason for joining the NADP and Link. My social life has taken off considerably since this last couple of years when I have sort of woken up to what you might call the deaf, the wider deaf community. I mean, I think, to be honest, that is my main motivation. I want to be an activist and I would like to change people's concept of deafness. But, I also get immediate satisfaction about just being here today.

Good.

Other than that my social life is, I would not say non-existent, but I do not have any social life in Preston. I mean, I have friends around: neighbours and friends. I don't have anything you call a social life; my social life is visiting my friends and relatives who live in other parts of the country.

If you were to describe a typical weekend for you, what would it be?

Ideally it would be a loving partner; a loving, living-in partner would it not! [Laughs]. I mean, I do believe in couplism! I am not trying to sell the idea of being on your own at all.

We're just going to take a short break now

[break in recording]

[56:29]

Okay, ready to start? Okay, just before the break, I was just starting to ask about your family and friends and your social life. What has been the impact your hearing loss has had on your relationship with your friends and family? You have already mentioned that it's more difficult to keep in contact with them. Anything else?

No, well, I think, in a way, it sets you apart. Looking at it from my friend's point of view and looking at me, I think you are in a situation where you have a friend or relative, but you are set apart to a certain extent because you can't relate to that friend because of his deafness in the same way you can relate to the other friend: like on the telephone, or to a big party.

So when you see John, it's just you and John basically, or if there are other people there, you are not relating to John because you can't get involved, you see? I think this happens with both your family and with your friends. I don't really think there's much distinction; I don't personally make any great distinction between my family and close friends, but I think it affects people – well, you are talking about a long period of time, I think. I get invited to parties but people know that when they invite me to a party I am not going to be able to mix and do the room like normal people do when they invite you to a party, or a wedding, but it's because you are an old friend, you know.

What sort of adjustments would you say people make for you, or do you make any for other people?

Well, my close friends and family now know that they can't communicate with me accept like this [indicates - one to one situation]. So, it's a waste of time trying other ways.

So you have to be in face-to-face contact?

Yes, like going for a walk for instance. I am a keen walker and there are some of my friends who go mountain walking, in the Lake District mostly.

Lovely.

Yes, and I can't talk whilst we are walking.

Why not?

Because, we are side by side, you see, and you have to stop and look.

Yes, I see.

At the moment, any way. And most people, when they go for a walk with friends, they walk along talking. When you are climbing Lake District mountains, you have to stop for a breather any way from time to time, and that is when I talk you see, otherwise I don't you see.

So you find then, even with your hearing-aids, you still have to lip-read them a great deal?

Yes, I do.

Right.

Yes, I think I rely on that really; it's quite different to separate. When they separate it at the clinic, by giving you tests, either without any visual clues, and with the visual clues, then there is a big difference in my perception,. I mean with visual clues, I can perceive about 90% of what is being said, but without them, I can't. I get zero at the moment.

Really?

Pretty well, yes.

And that is with your hearing-aids in, or without?

I have not had it tested with my normal hearing-aids but only had the tests in relation to the cochlear implant. Nobody has given me the tests, otherwise, which is interesting when you think about it; it's not the sort of thing they do at normal audiology clinics and you wonder why.

It is interesting saying even with your hearing-aids in you are still having to go on your lip-reading ability to be able to function. You are saying that with your implant you hope to be able to rely on your hearing again? Is that right?

I can't really talk about the implant yet because it's only about 5 days I have had it, you see. My perception of it at the moment is that it's not making a huge difference. Right. But they keep telling me it's early days, and obviously that is highly subjective.

[01:01:51]

Do you want to talk a little bit about your whole experience of deciding to go for the implant and having the operation and so on?

Yes, I find it fascinating! Erm, the first meeting was in Manchester in April and I think I have been back there about 6 times now up to the point of having the operation for various tests and things; very nice people. The atmosphere of the clinic is not like a normal NHS clinic. I mean, it's very quiet and uncrowded and unrushed and when you walk up to the reception they say, "Good morning, Mr Newton" because you are the only guy that is coming that morning! Then they have time to react to you, I suppose. I find the whole experience fascinating and I still do. I do think it's, and because I have had very little experience of hospitals previously, so just being in hospital and watching the activity of the hospital is fascinating.

How do you find the staff at the hospital?

They seem to be all beautiful young women! A rough view of a hospital is the young and beautiful looking after the old and ugly! I mean I certainly have never found anybody give me any negative thoughts of any kind; even the girl that brought me my tea was young and beautiful.

I will take some notes then! You said you had six visits before you had your operation?

Well, you have a preliminary meeting and then I was invited to an information session. Initially they were very concerned to make sure you understood the whole process. I think, to

be fair, they want to make sure your expectations aren't too high. So we had a group information session with about 12 people who were being considered.

Oh, there are other people also being considered at the same time?

Yes, we had this guy - Graham is it, Professor Graham? He started the whole process in the UK and came and gave us a talk, very interesting. And there a woman that had an implant about five years ago. So that was very general information. They said, "Do you want to be considered further?" and you say "yes", well, I did. The next meeting is with, well, they have to do some tests obviously of your present hearing. I went back twice for that because they decided they wanted to give me more tests, and you meet up with the surgeon and the lovely Deborah, Ms Mawman and Mr Sayeed, in my case, and they said, "Yes we are prepared to do it, if you want it". When you ask, "What is the benefit going to be?" He will not tell you! He didn't want to commit himself, you see. Because I am a bit asthmatic I had to see the anaesthetist, these are all separate visits, and then before the operation you need a pre-operative assessment to make sure you do won't peg out on the operation table or anything. Then finally you go and have the operation. So, I spend quite a bit of time to-ing and fro-ing on the train to Manchester. So that was April to November. I had the operation on 25 November. So it was like 6 months, almost exactly, from start to finish, or, start to start, you might say.

And did you pay for this yourself?

Oh, no! No. It's interesting, it's reputed to cost £25,000 but that is including all the attendance; it's not just the operation, not just the equipment. In any case, it just so happens at the moment people are talking about the cost of cochlear implants, yet you do not hear people talking about the cost of hip operations and things! Hospital care is an expensive business. It makes you appreciate the NHS. Any contact with the NHS makes you appreciate it. It's significant when people are asked about their opinion of the NHS: the nearer you are to having some experience of the NHS, the higher it is, comes in your estimations...[Laughs]. That has been proved time and time again. I have no complaints about the service at all. It was terrific!

Who originally referred you to have an implant in the first place?

Your GP has to refer you, but I said to my GP "I want you to refer me please" and he did not argue or anything.

Sorry, it was the deaf social worker who was the first one that told you about the implant.

You probably know her she lives, in Blackpool? Sorry I am not supposed to talk to Laura, am I [Laughs]?! She is fine. Foreign, originally from Eastern Europe, Geisa Weisel, thought if I could interpret that you would know who she was. Sorry what were you asking me about her?

I was trying to get an idea of what assistance you had from the NHS.

The reason I wanted to see her was because I was concerned more about the future more than the present and I thought this is not going to get better: that is one thing you can be sure of – if you are deaf! So if I miss out, you could get more and more isolated. So, that is really why I wanted to see the deaf social worker. In fact, the truth of the matter is, there is not a hell of a lot they can do for in that respect, but what she did do for me, for which I am very grateful, she said, "What about having an cochlear implant?" If you think you are going to get isolated and so on as an old codger, there is not a hell of a lot the social services can do. If you are physically unfit they can do the shopping for you. I do shopping for old ladies on behalf of Age Concern.

So you feel you are becoming more isolated?

Well, I think it's inevitable. It would be inevitable. Yes.

Because of your deafness?

Yes, I mean that just seems to be a logical progression.

[01:10:08]

As a matter of interest, are you still doing your lip-reading classes?

Well, I've signed up again in January, but I have to admit there is an ulterior motive there: I have serious doubts about the value of lip-reading classes. In fact, I have heard a bit from various people about this and I discovered my own thoughts and reflected in others that lip-reading classes is a bit of a misnomer really because quite a lot of people don't learn very much lip-reading in lip-reading classes, and that is either for some psychological reason or it's because there is something wrong with the training, isn't it? There is some inherent reason why people can't learn. Maybe they are not setting about it right, and that is one of the things, the reasons why I set up for the class in January, starting in January and it's free. It's an issue that has been raised by the NADP at the moment, because of the increasing cost of lip-reading classes because of the policy of Local Authorities as far as adult education classes are concerned. Lip-reading classes are, in many places, getting more expensive and there has been a petition, as I am sure you know, to try to get the government to do something about that. So I thought I ought to know more about it. Also, I mean, I think I should think about my own lip-reading skills. So there is a double motive there.

Excellent. So, do you want to say anything else in a social capacity? Are you still sailing?

I joined a walking group in Preston, very amicable bunch but I have not been for a long time, for two reasons: one is because I don't like the walks they do! They tend to be tramping around muddy fields and climbing over stiles and things. But, if I go for a walk, I like to be walking up something. The other reason is that I can't really talk to them while I am walking. Again, there is a problem when you are walking; there is usually twelve or fifteen people that meet every Sunday but because they meet every Sunday they always have difficulty in finding appropriate walks so you finish up, you know, round odd bits of Lancashire that may be quite pretty but they are not good walking country, not like the Lake District is.

Every time you come to a stile it takes ten minutes for everybody to climb over it, you know! I have never liked walking mob-handed any way: the ideal group, I think, is two!

What else? I've not done anything else. I thought of joining a bridge club but I've not actually found a suitable forum for that. But I think that is, if you like, my old age strategic plan - playing bridge - because that is a thing you can do, continue doing, until you are really on your last legs, you know.

Nothing wrong with playing bridge. I like a game now and then! I am just checking my list to make sure we have covered everything. One thing that did interest me was you mentioned your

other motive for joining lip-reading classes and, certainly earlier on, you were talking about how interested you were with the work with the NADP and Hearing Concern Link do. So, do you feel you are becoming more active in the wider deaf community?

Yes well, that is part of my strategic plan. I mean, that seems to be the obvious place to look for a wider social context, you see, other deaf people. And that is what I am doing, yes.

Okay, is there anything else you would like to tell us?

I have talked about my character and my work experience, and Link. I have just written an article for the NADP news letter about sailing and the problems that arose because of deafness. So, if you get it, it's going to be appear next February, I think.

I look forward to reading it.

I can't think of anything else. I think it's up to you to call the shots really.

Well, in that case, I would like to thank you very much for coming. We are going to stop the interview now at half past two. Thank you very much indeed.

Thank you!

[End of recording]