



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Roger Keeling
Interviewed by Colin Lennox

British Library ref. C1345/61

IMPORTANT

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Oral History
The British Library
96 Euston Road
London
NW1 2DB

T: +44 (0)20 7412 7404
E: oralhistory@bl.uk

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Interview Summary Sheet

Ref no: C1345/61

Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Keeling

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Roger

Sex: Male

Occupation:

Date and place of birth: 1941, Rotherham

Date(s) of recording: 20th June 2009

Location of interview: Holiday Inn, Washington, Tyne and Wear

Name of interviewer: Colin Lennox

Speech to Text reporter: Carina Raglione

Type of recorder: Marantz PMD660 on compact flash

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

This is Colin Lennox interviewing Roger Keeling on 20/6/2009 for the oral history project. The speech-to-text report's name is Carina Raglione. Roger, can you give me your full name and your date and place of birth, please?

Date of birth, 3 November 1941.

Could you give me your mother's occupation?

She was a housewife, that's all.

And your dad's?

He was a bus driver, a trolley bus driver. That's it. That is all he did. He never got beyond that.

Can you give me some background details on where you were born?

I was born in Rotherham, South Yorkshire and, four years later, I moved out of town into a village, and we had a small holding, and I worked on the local farms as a youngster, up to leaving school. I was born with a hearing loss in my right ear. It was profoundly deaf from the start. The left was so good it compensated for that loss, so I lived a normal hearing life through the first 30-odd years of my life.

When you say you moved into the country, do you mean country-country, or a smaller village?

A village out of the town, yes.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Yes. I have a step brother and sister and two other brothers.

All living at home?

All living at home for the first ten years of my life. Then the elder brothers, they moved away to university and my eldest brother went in the army. He served in the medical corps in the army and travelled around the world. My elder brother - all four of the brothers went to the local grammar school at Rotherham and then went off in different directions after that. When I left school, I started in the grocery trade and, for the first few years I worked, first of all, in an old sale grocer's and then in a retail grocer's. Then after that, I went on to bread and confectionery and did go door to door with the bread and confectionery.

Was that a promotion?

Yes, it was, really, then promoted to supervisor, a fleet of vans for Jackson's Bakery, which was based at Hull, but they had a branch at Rotherham. During this time, my hearing didn't affect me at all. I joined the local scouts, I joined the local pony club and the young farmers' club, everything like that, and lived as near as anything a normal life just like everybody else did.

[03:57]

Coming back to your family, can you remember your grandparents?

Just. I remember they lived at Doncaster and my father's brothers lived in Rotherham and Doncaster.

To the best of your knowledge, was there anybody else in your family that had a hearing loss?

Nobody at all. I have checked through the years and there is nothing ever comes up about deafness, apart from me.

I am making an assumption here, when you moved to the village that is where your school was? Your school was in the village that you moved to?

Yes, the primary school, up to 11.

What was your school like?

That was fine. There was no problem there. I remember I used to walk the mile up to the local school every day.

Were there many pupils at the school?

I wouldn't like to say at that stage. Maybe 700, something like that.

Have you got any abiding memories of the school?

Not really, no. There was nothing untoward. It was just normal thing. I had no bullying or any problems. At that stage, I didn't even have to sit at the front to listen to the teacher or anything like that, I was fine, except that I used to have to go once a week into Rotherham, which was about four and a half miles, I used to have to go into Rotherham, and I went to the clinic, and I sat there all afternoon. I went in the local shop with a penny and got a penny lollipop, sat in the clinic all afternoon, then the nurse would come in, who was a real dragon, and she would line us up and she had a tube with a pump on it, and she used to walk along and stick the pipe up our nose, squeeze on it two or three times, take it away, clean it, go to the next one, and then send us back home, back to the school, so it was great, because we missed the afternoon schooling.

From year 11, did you say? You stayed at that school until year 11?

Until I was eleven years old, yes.

Where did you go from there?

Then it was our tests to the grammar school, and then I went to the grammar school, which was back in the village again.

You travelled from the village to Rotherham?

Yes.

What were the highlights of grammar school?

Well, it was a grammar school, the head teacher with a cane. I didn't stand outside his study very often.

[07:12]

Were you sports-minded at all? Did you enjoy sports at the school?

Yes. Hockey was my favourite one, and I carried that on after school. I carried on with the steelwork teams and carried on through. I played cricket, I played football, but the main one was hockey, which was a painful one at times.

I can believe that. Did you have any other hobbies?

As I say, I was in the local pony club. We had horses. After four - when I was four, we moved out, as I say, from the town into the country, and I had - we had a small holding, and I had a pony, and we had sheep, the odd one, just a pig and one calf, and things like that, that is how I came to work on the farms, because I used to go and do work on the farms at harvest and so on, and even at milking, just to earn keep for my horse and so on.

It seems a bit different from working with the buses to working in a farm. There doesn't seem to be a...

The working on the farm was sort of school years and then, after that, it was the - well, it started off as the grocery trade, and then moved on to the buses when that became a dead end. During the secondary school period, when I was at the grammar school, that was when I started to have problems because of the loss, because I had to be, or asked to be sat at the front so I could hear what was going off and it became more prevalent, but still the other ear was so good, it compensated for the other loss.

What about religion? Were you a church person? Was there a church in the village?

I was head choir boy, soloist, alter server at the local village in church.

What about your politics?

A bit of everything, actually, because they are all the same. They look after you while ever they are getting your vote.

[10:03]

Roger, what was your first sign of hearing loss? You mentioned a wee bit earlier about being born.

I went off to work and everything was normal until my mid-30s.

You said normal. You were at grammar school and you had to sit at the front. Did anybody in your younger years say anything?

Possibly there was that bit extra from very early days. It seemed to be that little bit worse, but nothing showed up, and I didn't have anything done from leaving primary school until - well, I started having problems when I was 35-year-old. Nothing medically was touched, but it eventually started to be a struggle. Once I left school and started work, I worked normally, normal things, I went for interviews, everything. Everything was fine. As I say, I went on to the bus industry. I started as a conductor, then as a driver, then as a one-man operator, and then as an inspector on the Rotherham Council, Transport Department, and then I moved to Scarborough in 1974. Up to then, there had been no problems. Since, looking back at that, I think part of the story there is because Rotherham was an old town with old tram tracks all over the place, and the garage had tram tracks, so when you took the buses into the garage, you herringboned them in down the sides. The doors, on either end, were the side of two double-deckers side by side on each end of the garage, so the noise disintegrated very quickly. So I had no problems there. When I moved to Scarborough, the depot there was all confined space. There was one door in the big garage where the double-deckers went, but the single-deckers were underneath, and it was completely surrounded by reinforced concrete and there was just one little door at the front, big enough for a single-decker to go in, and it was so

tight in this depot that they had to employ a man to reverse the vehicles in, because you couldn't turn around inside or anything, because there were pillars all around the place, so you have got to shunt them in to park them up. I, by then, because I had been an inspector at Rotherham, I had been given responsibility for chasing the drivers out at Rotherham. I wasn't an inspector, as such. I was what they called a garage driver. I was responsible for allocating the vehicles and making sure the drivers got on the road on time, particularly in the morning, obviously, when they were first started. I used to have to go down into this depot and walk up and down the buses. There were probably three or four sat there revving the engine like mad, building the air up. Of course, within two years, my hearing suddenly dropped to probably a half of what it was, and which I put down to the noise, because I was in that noise all the time. We talk about 85 decibel being the threshold, well, they checked the meter there and it was over the top of the meter, there was that much noise in that depot, so obviously my ears and everybody else's were open to that noise all the time.

Was this Rotherham Council you worked for?

No, this was Scarborough. It was actually United Bus Company, which had head offices at Darlington, but they went as far south as Scarborough.

Did they have occupational health?

No, nothing like that then. I put up with that for a number of years, and I got to the stage part way along the line where I got help from my workmate, well, one of the inspectors who became the boss at my depot, and he looked after me, maybe because he came from the same area as me. He certainly looked after me from the point of view of instead of me running up and down with a bus, he would give me other jobs to do, like going out and seeing about complaints or going to his shops and selling these special rover-tickets, and things like that. Then he would give me work in the office helping the staff in there, which, actually, in a way, wasn't that good, because I tended to be on the phone all the time, which wasn't good, or talking over the counter to people in a noisy reception area, so that wasn't particularly good, but it was better than riding up and down on a noisy bus and having to ask people to repeat themselves all the time. Of course, when they are repeating themselves, I am getting slower and slower, so I am getting the next man's passengers, because I am running so late, they are coming out for his and they are catching mine, so it slowed me down, and it made it hard

work for me.

[16:48]

What was your next step medically? What prompted you to go to the doctors?

In 1977, which is three years after I went to Scarborough - I went to Scarborough in 1974, and by 1977, it had gone down sufficiently for me to warrant going to the doctor. He referred me to the hospital and I saw the consultant at the hospital who cleaned out my sinuses for a start, and then he offered me two sets of tablets, which he said were 10% successful. After those ---

Successful at what?

Solving the problem of the hearing. So, they didn't work. Nothing - it was still going down. So he said, "Well, I am giving you a hearing aid. I am afraid you won't get the hearing back, it is nerve deafness, sensorineural deafness. If anything, it will get worse. You just have to learn to live with the hearing aid". That was it. Gradually, over the time - well, I carried on up until 1988, working, and I always had problems, obviously there are jobs that crop up, you go for the job, you go for the interview, and there was always the question asked, "How are you going to manage with your deafness?" You can't tell them much, other than, well, you know, you have managed so far, you hope to be able to carry on, but it was always there, and I suddenly stopped getting any kind of promotion. I did get a signal inspector's job, again, because my boss was a friend who I had worked with right from joining them at Scarborough and, in 1986, there was a job came up at Whitby when the driver in charge - sorry, the inspector retired. Again, my boss, who had looked after me because of the deafness, again put me forward for that and I got that job, but I did apply for others in the meantime, and each time I didn't get it, and they'd ask that question about deafness, so, in the back of my mind, obviously I thought, this is why, because of the deafness. I moved to Whitby and I was there for two and a half years. During that time, I got this situation with - while I was at Whitby, I suddenly had a strange sensation that I was sat in the chair, and I daren't move. If I moved my head, I felt like I was going out unconscious. For the first time, I sat there for about half an hour. In the meantime, my wife rang the doctor, and he came and gave me an injection. He said that it was Ménière's. He gave me [inaud] tablets. The next time it cropped up, my wife put me in a taxi and ran me to the hospital, which were the doctor's surgery as well as the

hospital at Whitby. Again, they gave me an injection and I was fine after that. Over two years, this happened every so often. No explanation, as I said, they said it was Ménière's and I had to take these [inaud] tablets. Other times it happened for a minute or so, other times it would be up to half an hour. I remember going from Whitby to Scarborough, which was about a half an hour run, and nearly all the way, my sight were shut down on this side. I could just see a little pinprick out of the corner. The other eye was fine, but this one really closed right down. I then was made redundant at Whitby. They were cutting - it was after deregulation, and everything changed, and they did away with my job. They closed the depot and the idea was to run the operation in Whitby from other depots. Buses come through Whitby, do services in Whitby and carry on to Scarborough, or come through Whitby and go back to Middlesborough and Loftus. So that was me finished. There was nothing at Whitby to keep me at Whitby after that. There wasn't a lot more at Scarborough, but it was better bet than staying at Whitby, so I went back and we got a small guesthouse.

You say "we". That is your wife?

Yes.

[22:57]

When did you get married?

When did I get married? That is a long story, actually. Maybe it's to do with what we are talking about now, because I got married in 1962. I was divorced in 1974. I remarried in 1980. I was divorced in 2002, and remarried my first wife in 2005.

Do you think your hearing problems had anything to do with this?

My first wife wasn't involved very much in it, because it was 1974. That was before my problem, so the time with my first wife, at that stage, wasn't anything to do, as far as I am aware, with the deafness, but then my second wife, she was, shall we say, very anti-deafness. She would come out comments like "your deaf friends" and things like that, "You might as well go with your deaf friends" and wouldn't be involved in any way, shape or form. Sometimes she would go the opposite way and want to help and then the next day, 'no, no,

don't involve me in anything like that', and that was her attitude. She would do the deliberate things like mumbling away and turning the television up and then talking to me and things like that - all the things you don't do, she would do, and I was convinced that's what it was all about. Then, of course, she had been married before and she had got seven children who, by then, half of them were grown up, teenagers and older ones were in their 20s and got families of their own and such like. They were quite a rough lot, shall we say. It was no help to me at all. I was on my own. This continued from 1980 up to 2002, but I had gone from 1977 to 1993 with no suggestion of any help of any kind from anywhere. Then suddenly, I went down to the local hearing aid clinic one day for new batteries and I said about I could watch sport, because you don't need subtitles or anything like that for sport. I could watch sport on telly, but couldn't watch anything else or hear anything else and, of course, there weren't half the subtitles that there are now.

[26:25]

Who were you saying this to? You said you were at the clinic. Who you were speaking to at the clinic?

Sorry, the audiology technicians at the clinic. I said you know that's my problem at the time. That is what I was speaking about. They said why you don't speak to the man, Les Arrowsmith. I didn't know him. Never heard of him. They said he was social services officer for the deaf. I said, "Right". They gave me his details. I went home and my wife rang him. And he came and he showed me the loop system. He showed me the flashing light for the doorbell and how that worked. He gave me a vibrating alarm clock for under the pillow and explained about the different telephones you can get now with help to switch to TT with the telecoil. That, really, was the start of my coming out of my shell, because as I had been made redundant and moved into the guesthouse and had problems because I couldn't do anything in there, in other words, I couldn't answer the door because I was frightened that I wouldn't be able to hear, and I would have to explain again why I couldn't hear them. I couldn't answer the telephone, so I was shut off. If I walked down the street, I isolated myself, because I knew that people would avoid me, but I also used to walk down and I would see people coming towards me and because I was out in the road and all the noise and such like, I would avoid them, because I knew I wouldn't be able to hear what they said to me, and certain ones would talk to me, but others would avoid me so they didn't have to. You

gradually get further and further away from reality. That suddenly changed when I got these bits of equipment to help me. It suddenly changed, because I knew if there was anybody at the door. The telephone, I got my own version of the telephone with the telecoil so I could use it with the hearing aid and so on. I could hear the television on the loop system around the room and so on. That gradually brought me back out, but, at the same time, I got together with a social services officer, and I said, well, you know, if I go 15 years and don't know anything about this, how about the little old lady who lives out in no man's land? How does she get to know about these things? I said, you know, she doesn't, really, unless somebody brings it to her attention. I said, "Well, what about the hospital? Why doesn't the hospital - they do audio tests on everybody, so they have got a record, why don't they pass some of that information on to you so you can go and help them?" Well, then, confidentiality, and that is why nobody got to know anything like that. I said, you know, I have gone 15 years without hearing about anything like this. Surely, when you go for your first hearing aid you would expect somebody to direct you somewhere for further help after that. Now, according to the hospital at that time, everybody that left that department was given a booklet with information in about social services, about the different equipment that you could get and so on. Of course, I followed it through, because I got involved then. I followed it through. If you ask a member of the ENT team, they will say, "Oh, yes, everybody gets one of those booklets when they get a new hearing aid". But if you ask a patient who has got a new hearing aid, "I have never seen any book". You know, they certainly didn't do. Well, I got together with social services officer, and we actually built up a quantity of equipment with funding from social services and we actually had about £2,000 worth of equipment, loop systems, flashing lights, warnings, and all the lot. From then on, I started going out on my own, or with a social services officer and actually demonstrating this equipment and showing people and inviting them along to - I went to their homes and explained things, they came to my home and I got everything fitted up. I used the equipment from a hotel. They had the flashing lights on the backs of the doors and things like that, so I was set up to help them. This is where we went from there. That has carried on, right up until last year, actually. That has now finished, because the gentleman concerned has just retired through ill health, so I am back to on my own. In the meantime, I have had all sorts of involvement with all sorts of different organisations. I am a member of Hearing Concern since 1993, which was the same year I started on all this. I started off by - I went to Darlington and doing a two-weekend course as an adviser for Hearing Concern. Then I got involved with the Sympathetic Hearing Scheme, so I went to Manchester to learn about that. After that, I got involved in so much that they started making use of my equipment. They

invited me along to do lectures with the equipment at the training sessions. Since then, I have been all over the country, or for the next, shall we say, nine to ten years, from 1993, I went around places like Stevenage, Weston-super-Mare, Birmingham, with all the equipment, and that was part of the training weekend, for me to do a lecture on that.

[34:12]

When you say you went out with a social worker to people's houses to demonstrate the equipment, was that - was your equipment only for demonstration purposes, or did you hand that over to people and then replenish your stocks?

No, we just showed them the equipment and then social services would provide them with the same sort of thing once they tried them out. They were all live. They were all plugged in live. Even the loop systems - we would put a loop system around the area to show, a room loop, and things like that. Then we started training the care staff at social services, so I went along with all the equipment.

This increased activity with your social workers and your training courses. How did that affect your relationship with the wife?

That was her argument, that I was spending time with my deaf friends and doing this voluntary work that I should be helping her with the guesthouse. Well, it never happened like that, because I was always there for the guesthouse. I did my half, shall we say, of what we had to do. In fact, over half, because I prepared everything in a morning. She actually did the cooking, and then I helped with the changing and things like that. I did my bit, but it wasn't really that caused the problems, it was a family thing. One or two of her family didn't like me from way back, and it just carried on from there. They were telling her all sorts of tales of what I was up to. I would take leaflets out to doctors' surgeries, things like that, advertising the different things we were doing, and the local - because I was also the secretary of the local hard-of-hearing group, and I have been since 1993, anyway, so it all came together. I would go out and one of them would see me and suggest that I was doing something that I shouldn't be - visiting the doctors' surgery with leaflets.

You say that doctors considered you had Ménière's disease, a form of Ménière's disease. The

stress of what you were going through with your own hearing and some of the problems you had in the family, do you think that affected...

I think so. I think it has all affected it at some stage, yes. You have got worries about all these things at the same time about these things that are happening to you physically.

[37:43]

You mentioned before on a bus trip from Whitby you had issues with your eyes. Can you elaborate on that?

That is when I was diagnosed with Ménière's. The outcome of that, when I went back to Scarborough, the next time, more or less I went back to the hospital, the consultant at the hospital suggested that I should be in touch with another doctor, and he sent me to York. It was to have a scan X-ray. There was nothing like that at Scarborough Hospital at that time. He sent me to York. When I went back to see him after, the result of that was that, in actual fact, it was nothing to do with the hearing at all, it was to do with arthritis. Apparently the back of your brain there controls your balance and your sight, and the arthritis in the top of my spine was trapping the flow to the back of the brain there, and that is what was causing the loss of sight and the balance problems. More or less, from then on, it stopped happening, it just went away, so I had gone two years - the only thing was that I had to have a collar and if I felt these symptoms coming on, I put the collar on, and, indeed, I had one occasion where I did silly things without the collar, and I - I was sort of bent with my head up in the air doing electrical fittings and under drawing the ceiling in my backyard, and I actually finished up unconscious and off to the hospital, and they did the usual ECGs and so on. The consultant, when he came in said, "Where is your collar?" I said, "I only use it when..." He said, "Obviously you have been doing something you should have had your collar on for". That was it. That seemed to be the end of that completely then. It just went away.

[40:28]

Just finishing up on the theme of the buses - I am going back to your employment history earlier on when you worked in the green grocers and that. The buses seems to be a funny step - from green grocers into the buses. How did that come about? What is the link there?

The buses idea came from the fact that my father and my grandfather had all worked for Rotherham Corporation. My grandfather was a tram driver. My father was a trolley bus driver and I followed up and did a bit of everything.

It was in the blood?

Yes, yes.

You mentioned a bit about the groups that you got involved in with the equipment and that sort of thing. What was your experience with the hearing professionals? Did you have good experiences, bad experiences?

A bit of each, actually. When I first started, obviously it was after being trained with Hearing Concern. I went back to Scarborough with my letters of introduction and so on. These were sent to the hospital, to the ENT department, doctors and so on. At first, I got reactions of, “We are the professionals. You are nobody”. I even attended a care home on one occasion and was showing a lady about how to operate a personal loop system. In walked the ENT technician and was most put out that I had been there, but they know very, very little about the equipment that we use. Suddenly, after a while, they realised, and then some of them, not all, but some, started coming to me and asking advice on things and asking me if I would talk to people and such like, and explain about the different stuff. They knew by then I had got all this equipment that I could demonstrate to people as to what was what. I don't know, I seemed to have got a reputation whereby if it is something to do with technical equipment, see Roger.

You mentioned earlier that as part of this equipment, you attended training courses. How did you cope with that with your disability?

The training courses for such as Hearing Concern, et cetera?

Yes.

Well, they provide all the equipment and always have done. They have always provided. In

fact, I have gone early to the weekend and so on to fit up the loops along with the other officials of the groups.

[44:02]

That covers that side. What happens if you step outside of that? Did you have any further education outside the Hearing Concern or LINK or the Sympathetic Hearing Scheme?

With regard to equipment, et cetera?

No, your personal development.

No nothing.

What about travel then? How did you cope travel wise?

With regard to what?

Announcements on trains or the airports.

That was a no-go area for years. Travelling on trains and so on. I would simply ask and hope that I could understand what people were saying to me, which quite often wasn't very good. I once came back from London from an AGM, or something like that, and apparently the line was shut somewhere between Newark and Doncaster. There were announcements came over and I wasn't aware of the announcements. Then we got into York, and the train - my last train from York to Scarborough was ten-past eleven, and we got in about one o'clock in the morning, so I had to find somebody and ask them to explain to me what the problems were. Of course, in the end, along with others, we got a taxi. We were given a taxi back to Scarborough, but you are not aware of what is happening around you. If you realise that there is something not quite right, and, of course, we are back to the fact that your eyes take over from your ears and you see something that is not quite right, then, obviously, you have got to ask. Having said that, I am aware that, in the case of a lot of people, they wouldn't ask. We are back to the little old lady again. She wouldn't ask. She would just stand there. You know,

I would ask; at one time, I wouldn't have done.

[46:23]

In your experience, going from analogue hearing aids to digital hearing aids right through to what you have at present, what has been the difference as you have moved up that journey?

Well I've moved up, I started with the normal hearing aids from the clinic, and then I went out and bought, which was how the dispensers used to do it. The local television shop used to give your name and address of somebody who could help you with equipment for your television, to be able to hear your television. This guy comes along from Leeds and said, "Oh, it is not that equipment, it is the hearing aid. You want a hearing aid that is for you". On national health, you all get the same thing off the shelf. You need your own personal aid set to your hearing loss, and I fell for it. I got - I paid about, then, £300, £400 for a hearing aid that was good to me. I complained because it wasn't doing any of the things I had asked for, what they said it would do. I was given £25 off a new one, which was an old in-the-ear aid. I finished up paying up £500, £600 for aids that at the end of the day, the consultant at the hospital went mad about, because he said, at that time, he could provide 47 different aids on the national health for me. One off the shelf was just sales talk, and I had wasted my money. So I carried on normally with that, then we came on to the digitals, but with the digitals, I was - I gradually crept up in the quantity - the quality of the aids that I had, and they couldn't give me anything better. Then when the digitals came along, I had already tried a digital, and I had been told, by a private dispenser, and I was told it wouldn't help me at all, but when they - I actually dealt with the local - when the government did the refurbishment and provided that 94 million for ENT, I was consulted by the ENT department as to what questions, et cetera, were sent out to people and about the pecking order in which they were going to dish them out, and so on. They invited me and my group to comment on them. Then I went along, having started - they were starting to dish them out. In fact, they dished half of them out. I went along and I said, "What about my digital aid?" The doctor who I saw said one of two things - well, he said, "You won't get one". I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, look at your age", which was 62, "And look at the expense". I said, "I didn't think the age came into it, but certainly the expense, surely the 94 million that the government are giving us for introduction of digital aid covers that?" He said, "You won't get one". Of course, I went home and wrote my letter of protest to the hospital and, within weeks, I got my digital aid, but I had to put

pressure on. Again, the same question. That's me, what about the little old lady? So that was the reaction on that. That was in 2002, I think, 2003, maybe. Then in 2004, I had always been against interfering with what I got. When cochlear implants were mentioned, I said, "No chance". I wouldn't risk losing that by having the operation.

[51:54]

Can I jump in there? What difference did digital aids make to your communication?

Yes, sorry. Nothing. I actually got a little more clarity, but I didn't get any more volume, and I only had them for a very short period of time. That was a test. On one side, I tried them, and I got nothing extra out. That is when I decided to look at cochlear implants. As I said, I had looked at them before and said, "No chance". As I got involved with the hard of hearing and deaf and the workings of the thing, and doing lectures and so on, I realised that the ears are two separate units. In actual fact, what they do there does not necessarily affect there. I asked again about them. I was advised who to ask for, et cetera, and I applied. I went to my doctor, and was referred to the hospital to see this consultant. Unfortunately, I saw his understudy first. The understudy was the same gentleman that I had seen about the digital hearing aid, and he gave me the exact same answer, "You won't get one because of your age and the expense". I just said to him that I had actually come to see the consultant, and he said well, he would go and see the consultant for me, but he said he would take notice of me. He said, "You won't get one". So two or three minutes later, he came back and said the consultant had referred me to Bradford, which is the Yorkshire Cochlear Implant Centre for assessment for a cochlear. We went from there. The end of 2005, I got my cochlear implant. I have never looked back.

Can you explain a bit about the process? What did your assessment consist of? What was the surgery like? What was the aftermath?

We started off with the normal tests that you would have for a hearing aid. Then they got more intense. Everything was checked thoroughly. Everything to do with your hearing was checked from all angles, and the outcome of it was, after several months of seeing audiologists, seeing the speech therapist, allsorts of people like that, because that comes into it, there are other people with cochlears who never had speech up to getting the cochlear, and

they are learning to speak as well. They went through the old process and the outcome of it was that the audiologist suggested they may delay my cochlear because I had 42% hearing in that ear, and the threshold in Yorkshire was 40%. They may hold me back a bit. Anyway, I said - I spoke to different people online in a group, cochlear group, and they all suggested that 50% is the actual threshold everywhere else. The outcome of it was that they were looking at it in Yorkshire, and I got mine, I got through and got my cochlear, which consisted of - I had pre-medical checks, I had X-rays and scans and so on to make sure that everything is in place so that the operation can go ahead. So they can get the equipment through, the drill through, which everybody goes through. I went to Bradford on 12 October 2005 and stayed overnight. The operation was the following morning. I went down for surgery about half-past nine, and was back on the ward by one o'clock, the recovery ward. I didn't have a lot of the things that people suggested they do have after the operation. I had a little bit of pain around the side but no real pain, no headaches. The nurses were continually asking me if I wanted paracetamol, or whatever pain killing tablets, and I didn't need anything. One thing that did happen, and I found out when I was switched on, the tinnitus I had for quite a few years disappeared. It wasn't half as bad as a lot of people had - it was just sort of a buzz to me, very annoying, obviously, at night, because when I took my hearing aids out, that is when I could hear it, and that is when I didn't want to hear it, because I was on the pillow and wanting to go to sleep. But it actually went, a lot of people say when they have had the operation, the tinnitus gets worse, but in my case, it went the other way. The following morning, they took the bandages off, and I went down for X-ray, came back. Shortly after, the registrar came along and said, "There you are, a perfect cochlear curl", and he showed me the negative, put it on the light box and showed me the cochlear curl, and it looked good. I have got a cochlear Nucleus Freedom Aid.

How did he arrive at that choice? I believe there are three?

There are two. We only had the choice of the Cochlear one or the Med-El. We don't have the Advanced Bionics at Bradford. They may now, I don't know, because they keep changing these things. I was given that on recommendation by the audiologist, because he said that it was the most reliable when it came to loops, the T position, because he said I know that you live by loops, because I had lived by the loop for years. I mean, I used to have - going back to what you were asking earlier, actually, other meetings that I went to, I used to take along my own either personal loop or a room loop. I used to go to meetings half an hour early and set

up the loop around the room ready for the meeting and then certain people, I would encourage them to advise everybody to use the loop. Sometimes I found myself having to explain to everybody what the loop was for. On other occasions, I used to have a personal loop with several attachments and microphones off to make a full - so they could put them on the table and pick them up and speak, just for my benefit. My idea behind that was, hopefully, when other people realised that they had got access like that, they may come, but it was bit of a waste of time, because nobody took it on. I couldn't get anybody else to get involved. The audiologist knew that I had always had full use of loop systems, and he said that that one was the better one for that. At that time, it was the one with the least problems with regard to leads and things like that. He pushed that to me for those reasons.

[01:02:12]

How long after the operation did you get out of hospital, and what was the recovery at home like?

After the operation, that was it, I was free to go home. Now unfortunately, I had arranged for my son to come up and pick me up on the Saturday. I was cleared on the Friday, but then I had to wait for the Saturday to go home. Then I had 35 days of complete silence.

How did you cope with that?

Not very well, because I always had something, even if it was a poor response from a hearing aid or something. I always had something. Except that I was used to it at night, because at night when I took the hearing aid out, I had nothing, or I couldn't hear anything. There was something there, but those 35 days was horrible, with nothing at all, and knowing I couldn't put anything in there to get any sound, but I coped. I had been involved with the signing deaf and I don't profess to be a particularly good lip reader, but obviously over the years I have learned more and more lip reading. I actually am a - as secretary of my club, I actually organise the lip reading locally. I have two groups of lip readers, and we have a tutor that comes in and does classes every week, so I am involved. I don't go to all the classes, but I go along for half an hour, here, there and everywhere and advise them on all sorts of different things, make use of the classes to do more of the rehabilitation, shall we say. I went along, and we switched on and the first words my wife said was that my volume had gone down

100%, because I - up to then, I did shout. I was aware of that. You could see people turning around in the street. Somehow, I had to get louder than the noise around me, so I shouted to get over the top of it.

It is a big day for anybody who gets a cochlear implant, the initial switch-on. What was the process in that? What process did you go through?

The thing about the cochlear is the success of it depends, in my opinion, to a great degree on your hearing history. I went 35 years with very, very good hearing in one ear. Granted, it is only at one side, and this is why I have problems even now with the cochlear with background noise and such like, because everything is going into that one side. I had gone 35 years with good hearing, and then it went down. A lot of other people may have had very little hearing of any kind in either ear from birth or young age, et cetera, before they were actually proficient lingually, so their brain and memory doesn't give them what I have got. It is all up there. I have to take it back out, so my speech is good. A lot of people have difficulty with speech. They have to learn again because they have never actually had the speech. I have to be careful now, because I can't brag about my - going on from where we have left off with regard to the process, I then had two or three quick sessions and tests on sound, things like that. I had to travel over 180 miles round trip each time I went to the clinic, because I am in East Yorkshire on the coast, and the cochlear centre is in Bradford, West Yorkshire. But then, it was a case of tests every so often and percentages every so often and I started with maybe 70%.

Did you hear straight off with the implant? Did you hear right away?

Yes. Don't forget I did have some hearing up to the operation, anyway. I started straightaway. As I said, my wife's comment was that my volume had gone down 100%, and I could hear everything in there, and that is why I could hear 100%, or dropped down 100% in volume, because I could hear my volume then, so I didn't need to shout. Then I had checks every two or three weeks, then every quarter, then every six months, until now, it is an annual check. I gradually crept up over the first six months until I was 98%. Of course, I use to brag about it, I used to go online and say about what I achieved, thinking I was helping people, but, in actual fact, I wasn't helping anybody, because the ones who didn't get that, obviously it was upsetting for them, because they had only got 60 and so on, but they - again, it is their hearing history that dictates how well they do out of it. Some of them work harder and do get that bit

more. But with all sorts of things - I asked a consultant in London the other week at the National Cochlear Implant Users Association AGM, [to STTR] Did you get that love? I asked the consultant that was there giving a lecture about this business of different consultants have different ideas. My consultant - my idea was have the cochlear in the bad side. If anything goes wrong, I can always revert back to my hearing aid in the good side. When I went along to Pete, the consultant, for the first time and put that to him, he said, "Well, you can forget that, because if you had no hearing in that ear from birth, it is quite possible there will be nothing, or very little stimulation to send the signal to the brain, so it will be a complete waste of time". That is why he went for the other one, which I now thank him for, most sincerely, because had that not happened, I may have been on 60 per cent hearing in an ear that hadn't got the right amount of drive to get the hearing up to my brain. The other side was still good from when I did hear, hence the 98% that I get out of it now. As I say, I still have some problems with group noise from background and such like, because of the fact that it is only at one side. Well, I am satisfied that I am not likely to get something at the other side. I can always think that maybe if I had one on the other side as well, it would have made it better, but, now, it has been stated that you are not allowed, unless you have got another sensory problem, you know, you are not allowed to have the two cochlears, as long as you pay for them yourself, but you certainly wouldn't get two cochlears unless you had, say, a sight problem or something like that. This is the new - I am lost for the word, but it is the new ruling on.

[01:12:23]

It is a directive of NHS. Obviously you have done a bit of homework before you got the implant. You mentioned being online, and some of the things online say that the implant won't work, and they always emphasise the fact that it will not replace natural hearing. What is your opinion on that? Is your implant close to natural hearing as you ever had?

I think it is as close as you are going to get. It's not - everything else you can replace, but the hearing, is something I do believe you can't replace. The hearing, it is as good as it is going to get for the next 50 years, I would have thought, with the cochlear, but, again, we are always controlled by the individual and what they can get out of it. It is no good saying, "Well, it worked for me". I used to say the same thing about equipment. I was always, "Try the piece of equipment". It may not work for you. It works for me; it doesn't mean it is going to work

for you. Again, it is the hearing history, the make-up of the old thing as to whether it will work successfully for you.

What is your communication like now? Can you use the telephone, mobile phone, that sort of thing?

Yes, yes. I still use the loop system if it is available. I still lip read. I still use text on the television. If those facilities are there, I use them, but it is like a bonus now.

How do you think this has changed your life from where you were?

It has changed it tremendously, certainly since before I got the cochlear. Before I could cope because I was involved very much, so I could do my own - providing loop systems and flashing lights and all the rest of it, because I had them there, and we were using them daily, but now I don't use them half as much, but if they are there, as I say, I would make use of them. I wouldn't just say, no, doesn't matter.

[01:14:58]

That about relationships, your wife and family?

Oh, we're fine.

Has it improved as a result of the cochlear?

Well, I am now back with my first wife, and our problems that were - actually, it was a question you asked earlier on, and my wife insists that this is the case, that in actual fact, it was because we didn't talk that we had the problems in the first place, and then by the fact that I visited my daughter and my wife was around the corner, we managed to get together and talk, because she used to come to my daughter's when I was there. Whether she came deliberately, I don't know, but we started to talk, which was something we hadn't done before. I was so wrapped up in my - when I was a bus inspector, Rotherham Corporation, going back to the early 1970s, we had decimalisation in the early 70s, things like that, so there was a lot of pressure work-wise, and that is when we sort of drifted apart pretty quickly.

Now, it is considerably different. We do everything together and, of course, the children have all grown up and flown the nest. We have both got an interests in our families, in our children and grandchildren.

So it has made a considerable difference?

Yes, yes.

Just a couple of things, as we wind up. Do you ever feel - you mentioned earlier on discrimination at your work, promotion-wise and that. Can you elaborate a wee bit on that? Have you come across it in any other walks of life?

I used to have a problem at work with regard to; again, because I was deaf and I was loud, that was always the excuse. If I chased a driver - I was a bit funny. I used to - if I saw something wrong, I wanted it putting right there and then. I didn't believe in - I would report it, I would put it on paper and report it, but I wanted it putting right. When you are in the public eye, they want to see you put it right. That is how I worked things. If I found something wrong, whether it is was the customer, the passenger or whether it was the driver, I would let them know and let everyone else know what was going off. Of course, when it came to reprimanding, that was their excuse. The union went up with them and said, "He shouted at me". That was always an excuse, the fact that I had upset them by shouting at them. It didn't alter the offence or anything, but they said that is what was there, I yelled and shouted at them and embarrassed them in front of the public and such like.

You said a personal friend, your manager, paved the way for promotion. Do you think you would have got that promotion if he hadn't been there?

I don't think so, no. No, that is there, it is in the back of your mind all the time, that had the right people been in the right place at the time, it wouldn't have happened the same. It would have all been different.

You mentioned the assistant consultant.

Yes, the doctor under the consultant. I was surprised, because I always got on fairly well with

him over the years, but it was always usually a case of come in, sit down, hearing aid out, over the ear out, put it back in again, and go. Six months. But that particular one was very not deaf-aware, because he would come out of his office, particularly if the nurse was with somebody else, he would come out of the office with your record in front of his face, and he was also an Arab, so he had an accent, so you can imagine an Arab accent in front of a book; it was really terrible. You couldn't understand him at all, because he had a strong accent.

[01:20:17]

Finally, to wind up, as a result of your implant, is there any activities or travel - do you have to make special travel arrangements or anything because of it, or is it just like a normal hearing aid?

With regard to travelling with regard to?

Abroad, airplanes?

No, you can't go through the scanners at places like airports, and occasionally you may get a strong one in some of these big stores and such like that it beeps a little bit, and everybody looks around, but airports are no problem at all, because you have got a card that you are issued with when you get the implant and you simply show that as you go in, and - well, I have experienced this since 19 - 2005 now, and each time I have gone abroad, I just show the card and they pass me around the outside and done a quick body check, and away you go. I had more trouble before that, actually, with hearing aid batteries setting the alarms off, but, no, no problem likes that, no.

I would like to thank you very much, Roger. It was a very interesting and full account and I think we'll just finish there.

[End of recording]