



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Ross Trotter
Interviewed by Andrew Goodwin

British Library ref. C1345/64

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

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Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Trotter

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Ross

Sex: Male

Occupation:

Date and place of birth: 1945, Bournemouth

Date(s) of recording: 21st June 2009

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

Name of interviewer: Andrew Goodwin

Speech to Text reporter:

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

This is Andrew Goodwin interviewing Ross Trotter, Sunday 21st June 2009, at 10 past 10 in the morning. This for the unheard voices project in Washington North East England. Good morning, Ross. Thank you very much for coming here. This is going to be a chance for you to tell us your particular stories. Now, all good stories start at the beginning so would you like to tell us first of all a little bit about your childhood? If you can give first of all just tell us about your parents, what were their names and what they did for a living, that would be a good start.

My father whose name was Robert Burns Trotter, and I better explain there my full name is Robert Ross Trotter, Ross is my middle name, but because my father was known as Robert I've always been called Ross. My father worked in insurance for what used to be the Commercial Union. He was actually born in Edinburgh, but was brought up in Devon, so spent all his life in the south of England. My mother whose name - she was Betty Margaret, and she was actually christened Betty not Elizabeth. She had worked in a department store in Bournemouth in her youth. Those were in the days when this was a really good job, a really good job to have. But when she married she stopped work. My parents were married in 1939 right at the start of the war, but they decided they did not want to have children and while the war was going on, which is why I was not born until September 1945. Unfortunately my mother contracted septicaemia when I was born and that rather put her off having more children, which is why I am an only child. I was born in Bournemouth but they moved to Southampton when I was 3, 3 years old, so I was actually brought up in Southampton. My mother was a Roman Catholic. My father was not at that time. His mother was, if anything, Scottish Presbyterian, but he would not was a church goer but I was brought up in the Catholic church and I used to go to church with my mother. My father actually became a convert to the Catholic church after his mother died, but that happened later on.

[03:38]

So, that is why I went to a Roman Catholic school in Southampton. It was a private school. And my parents were not well-off. They forego - they forewent a lot of things in order to pay for my education and I'm very fortunate, very grateful to them because this gave me a very good grounding. It also has another relevance because it was a school run by an order of

Christian brothers, so, therefore, the same brothers used to go from school to school but it was the same order so sometimes they would come back to the school so it was very much like a home so I went to the prep school then on to the main school and I was quite a good scholar I was either always first second or third in my form, so I did my O Levels when I was 14. I did 8 O Levels when I was 14.

[04:51]

So, having passed those I then went on to do A Levels and I was in my first year of doing my A Levels so at the age of 15 when I contracted meningitis. I actually had a friend staying with me for a week and in the morning we were playing tennis and I felt absolutely fine, but after lunch I began to feel a little bit dizzy, so my mother and my friend went out for the afternoon, I said I would lie on my bed. When they came back I looked so ill they immediately called the doctor who immediately made sure I was taken to hospital. And 24 hours later I was deaf. So it was just like - it was just very, very sudden indeed. One thing was that it was touch and go at one point whether I would actually live because as I say I was brought up in the Roman Catholic church, I know I actually had the last rights said over me because they were not sure if I was going to survive the night. Now, that is why they've never been sure whether my deafness was caused by the meningitis itself or by the drugs which they used when I was going through that crisis. They used streptomycin at that time, which they do not use now because it has so many side-effects. But anyway I went into hospital with perfect hearing. I woke up profoundly deaf. It's a very long time ago, but I still remember that at first my parents they told me "oh your hearing is a bit blocked at present, but don't worry it will come back" because they'd obviously been told by the doctors that they had not to sort of load everything on me all at once. So it was only after 2 or 3 days that they then told me I would never hear again and I would never get my hearing back. And I remember I cried for hours because it was absolutely a traumatic time. Then I really thought to myself, well either I can just give up or I can go on from here and as I was only 15 what was the point of giving up? So, it was onwards and upwards, as it were, after that.

[08:24]

I was in hospital for 3 weeks which is actually I think quite a short time for meningitis, but then I went home. I lived in Southampton at that time. I'd been at home for about one week.

There was a knock on the door. My mother opened the door and there was this gentleman standing on the doorstep and he said "good afternoon, my name is Jack Leatherwood, I have come to teach your son to lipread." Just like that. And I don't think that would ever happen now! We had not asked for this help. We don't even - I don't to this day know how he had been informed, what the chains of communication were, but obviously the hospital must have somehow contacted the education people. They had sent him round, so I was very fortunate because Southampton was really in the forefront at that time, they were way ahead of the game. If I'd been living anywhere else I probably would not have got that.

So, Jack first of all came to my house to give me a lipreading lessons and then when I went back to school he was to come to my school twice a week and he used to give me a lesson there. So, right from the start I was being taught to lipread. On the medical side, I'm a lot hazier about which consultants I saw because it's so long ago and that really didn't have the same positive benefit for me as learning to lipread did. But the main hospital in Southampton at that time was the Royal South Hants hospital and I know I saw various consultants there and must have seen audiologists. I do remember one doctor coming to me and saying "you're very deaf, you know! " Yes I could have told you that before you said anything". That was completely useless thing to say and that was about the most constructive thing any of them said so I wasn't quite so impressed by them. I did know that I saw the audiograms they took, and I had between minus 105 and 110 decibel loss in both ears.

That is extremely deaf isn't it?

It is because the bottom is 120, minus 120, so I had as near to no hearing as it's possible to get. This was 1961, and they did try me with hearing-aids, Siemens used to make hearing-aids, in those days big bulky things with silver casing. It was the most powerful one you could get at that time and with that very powerful aid I could just tell the difference between "rrr" and "sss". That was it. That was all I could do.

Not really much use then?

No. Also I decided I couldn't be bothered wearing these you huge things in my ears because they were huge I mean, you didn't have behind the ear aids or anything in those days so I thought I'm not going to bother on this, I prefer to concentrate on lipreading. So I said I don't want an aid. I did see other people later on who thought I was wrong, some doctors felt that

even if you've only got small amount of residual hearing you should use an aid to try and pick up things, but that was what I wanted to do. Of course hearing-aid technology has advanced, but by that time I was so used to not wearing hearing-aids with just lipreading I never bothered to try again and I have never really been back to a hearing-aid clinic since.

[13:29]

If I can ask you a question, going back to the point when your parents were told that you were now completely deaf, can you tell me what their reaction was?

Yes. Of course, I did not at that time know what their real reaction was because they put on a different face to me. They put on a very positive face to me. But I know that it more or less destroyed my mother. She took sleeping pills for years afterwards because her nerves had been so badly affected, but at the time she never let me know that. She was positive and my parents were an absolute rock to me. They were so supportive. And I could never have achieved what I have achieved without them. As I said I was an only a child and of course this was even more of a shock to them. As I say I was doing very well at school. They could see me going to this bright and glittering future, and suddenly no hearing. What was going to happen to me? So, it must have been very difficult for them. But as I say they didn't let on at the time. My father took a very much more positive spin. He decided to get involved with the deaf world. Now, at that time in the Southampton area, the only real group that was going was the Hampshire Deaf Children's Association, which was the local branch of the National Deaf Children's Society. Although I was 15, I was hardly a deaf child any more, but my father joined that and he rose to be Chairman of the branch so he got very involved in the deaf world. He was at one time on the National Executive of NDCS by which time I was in my twenties. But because of my deafness, he wanted to put something back. So, my parents were absolutely brilliant.

[16:16]

When you went back to school, am I right in saying you went back only a few weeks after you came out of hospital?

Yes, I actually missed a whole term because I had meningitis during the Easter break so we were on holiday when it happened so I missed the whole of the summer term. What happened was I did go back just for the mornings and very last week of the summer term just to sort of ease me back. Then I had the summer holidays so I actually only went back again for the autumn term, which of course was the start of my second year of A Levels. This where the fact it was a Roman Catholic school helped because the brothers were there living there the whole time, so I actually went and saw some of them during the summer break and they tried to give me a bit of one to one tuition to help me catch up on what I'd missed. The benefit being because I was doing A Levels, the class sizes were very much smaller by then. My main subject was English. I think there were only 6 of us doing the English, so I was in a small group. But I found lessons very difficult indeed because I couldn't really lipread what was going on. I had Jack coming to give me the lipreading lessons, but that was it. But, because it was a home and the teachers were all brothers in this order they gave me a lot of time out of school which meant I was able to pass my A Levels.

[18:19]

So, what happened after school? Did you go on to university?

Yes I did indeed, because I'd always wanted to do that, so I applied to quite a few different ones to read English. I was given interviews at three including one I went to Oxford University Magdalen College for an interview there. That was a terrifying experience because again I had no support in those days. You didn't have notetakers, you didn't have lip speakers, you didn't have speech-to-text reporters, so I just had to go and lipread and the Oxford one was about 6 people, and it was horrifying. They made me feel about six inches tall. I didn't get that one. I was actually quite grateful I didn't. I also had interviews at Bristol and they were very nice. The lead Professor there he was charming. He spoke very, very clearly. And when the others asked the questions, he would repeat it because he knew I was finding him easier to lipread, so Bristol did actually offer me a place, but in the end I went to Queen Mary College in London for one main reason: the Professor wore a hearing-aid in both ears. He was actually becoming quite deaf himself. That meant his colleagues had experience of dealing with a hard of hearing person because he was their boss and although they'd never had a deaf student before, they were willing to give me a chance and actually I

thought for somebody living down on the south coast London was a better place to be than Bristol. Oh that's where everything was happening, you see.

Would this be around the mid sixties?

That's correct. 1963.

I can see why you wanted to move to London, Carnaby Street and –

Absolutely but I mean really that sort of sixties scene to some extent passed me by. I didn't go out to these mad parties. I was far too serious at school for that. But it did mean that I got very good support when I went to Queen Mary College to read English because Prof. Cowan, that was his name the one with the hearing aids; his hearing got progressively worse over the 3 years I was there. We would say to him "what play of Shakespeare will you be talking about in the next lesson?" And he would say "new lecture theatre" because he obviously hadn't understood what we said. So, seminars with him, the others realised were great fun because he would ask questions and they could say whatever they liked and he would say "yes that's right" and then give the real answer because he hadn't understood what they'd said.

Did you get very good marks in your results then?

I got an upper second, a BA honours upper second. I could probably have got a first if I hadn't spent all my time playing squash, table tennis, drinking, doing other things. I found I had to do a lot of work on my own. What I did was for the lectures I asked one person to put carbon paper under their notes. I tried to lipread what I could, which wasn't much, but then I used to get my friend Nick's notes and take those and I had to do a lot of reading on my own. Seminars were all most a waste of time because we were all round a table, all putting points in and there was no way I could follow what was being said, but again because the staff were used to working with this hard of hearing Professor, they gave me one to one tutorials to try and overcome what I was missing in the lectures, so again they were very, very supportive.

[23:40]

But then the next stage after that was what was I going to do for a career? I originally had

wanted to teach, but I felt that it wouldn't be fair either on myself or on pupils to try and do a sort of general teaching of a class of hearing people. That was a step too far. I'd always been interested in reading and books, so I decided to go for librarianship instead. So, the next thing was to try and get to a post graduate degree in Library Studies. And that's where I had a lot of trouble because a lot of them said they felt that I needed to have some library experience before I went on the course, whereas others said I really should go on the course first before I got the experience. So I was getting different views and I was finding it very difficult to actually get a position in library school. But I got offered an interview at Queens University Belfast, and they said they would be willing to take a chance on me doing their one year post graduate course, so I said "yes please". So, I actually spent a year over in Belfast. This was 1966, '67, so, before the troubles in Northern Ireland started although even then you could see things brewing up. We had one boy in our class who was a staunch Republican and if at any time any of the lecturers used to refer to the place Londonderry he would object and he would not let the tutor go on until they called it Derry, without the London. I gather he later on ended up in prison because of rioting and I'm not in the least surprised. But, what I did in Belfast is I honed my carbon paper technique. Instead of just asking one person to do it, I had 4 people doing it all of whom happened to be girls in the group. So, they were referred to as my harem because I would walk in with these 4 girls and we would all sit in a row. We were putting carbon paper under their notes. And then in the evening I would take all 4 copies and collate them because what one person had missed the other one had got.

Very good idea. Are you still friends with these girls?

Just one of them. Just one of them only. She now lives in Canada and we still exchange birthday and Christmas cards. And the person who did the carbon for me in my English course in London, he also strangely enough became a librarian and he rose to be County of Reference Librarian for Hampshire, and I am still great friends with him. He's actually going to stay later in the year, so we've been friends ever since.

So, you completed your course in Belfast.

And then of course the next thing was to get a job.

This 1967?

This is 1967, yes. Actually of course jobs were easier to get in those days, but actually the number of people taking library school courses had exploded over those years and it was becoming a lot more difficult because a lot more qualified graduates were coming out of the library schools then than there had been say 5 or 10 years previously. But again my deafness started to become a real barrier. I applied to lots of places and some of them said “well we are a very small library where everybody has to do everything. We think that because of your deafness you'd be much better off in a large library where you can specialise on one thing”. So I then applied to large libraries and they said well “we're so large, it would be so difficult dealing with all these different people you'd be much better off in a small library where everybody knows each other”. Ah! So I was going round in circles. Now, what I was very lucky is one of the lecturers at the library school, Peter Lewis, he was doing a special 6 month project for what was then the British National Bibliography in London which was a weekly list of new books published in Britain fully catalogued and classified, so therefore libraries could buy catalogued records from BNB instead of doing it themselves. Now, because Peter was doing this project for them, he said “would you like me to put in a word with them”? I said “yes please” because I was getting nowhere at all. So, he did so and they called me to London. I was interviewed by somebody called Joel Downing who became a very, very, very good friend. He is my absolute mentor in the library world. It was Joel who - he interviewed me - he wasn't the top boss that was Giles Wild, he was the second in command, and Joel was willing to give me a try so he offered me a job. Yes please! So I became a cataloguer for what for me was the princely sum I remember it now was £1265 a year which was a lot of money at that time. And my ambition was to earn £3000 by the time I was 30. And I did. I got way above it. I got way above it.

[31:51]

Well done. So this was a 6 month project you said?

Yes - no, no, no, no - it was Peter who was doing the 6 month project for BNB but they offered me a permanent job as a cataloguer. So, for the first year there I was doing the actual catalogue records, but I'd always shown more interest in classification than in cataloguing and as this was '67, at that time BNB we used our own in-house version of the Dewey Decimal classification. It was a slightly modified version. So, after about a year I was put on that side

of it, assigning the Dewey numbers to the records rather than doing the actual catalogue entries. So I was working with somebody called Eric Finity who was Head of Classification who became my other mentor. Eric, he was a staunch Baptist. He was a lay preacher in the Baptist church, very mild man, never did anything much in the library world, he was not known at all, but he was so charming, his speech was absolutely perfect, I could lipread every single word he said. So, he was ideal for me. And I loved working with him. And of course Joel was still mentoring me. Now, because the Dewey numbers we used were non-standard, it meant that in fact libraries when they took the BNB cards they usually had to change the Dewey number to a standard one. Now the Dewey scheme is edited over in the USA, always has been, still is. So, the editor was over in England and he was asked could he use our BNB Dewey numbers? He said no, because they're not standard. So, we decided we would have to change over to using proper Dewey numbers and drop the in house scheme. At first they were put at the bottom of the entry and somebody called Joyce Brewin, later Joyce Butcher, who actually became my boss later was doing this, but she actually came from Chicago and she decided to go home to the States. Now, when she'd been on holiday I was the only person who had shown any interest in this work, so when Joyce was leaving Joel Downing called me into his office and said "would you like to be head of the Dewey section?" "Yes please". "You are!" You can't do that kind of thing these days. No interview, no selection board. I was just made head of the Dewey section, full stop. And basically it all came from [inaud] because we then started using standard Dewey. I went over to the library of congress for Washington the first time in 1972 an exchange with colleagues in the Dewey office there, and they came over to us. I've been back to Washington five times and I know this is going to sound very big headed but I became Mr. Dewey UK. I was the person who knew more about the Dewey scheme than anybody in the UK and that was the case for many years. So, in fact my name became very well-known in the library world for that. I have given papers at conferences both in England, Ireland, Germany, Norway, so Dewey has actually been very, very good for me.

[37:02]

Now - but this led to really my - to a whole change of things because when it was starting off I was right at the bottom of the rung so I didn't have make phone calls because I was too lowly, low down to do this, but obviously when I became a head of the Dewey section I had more meetings to take part in, phone calls to make and my deafness became more of an

obstacle than it had been, than I had been when I was right at the bottom. So, two things happened. First of all I used to have to ask my staff to make the phone calls for me and most of them were very happy to do so. Only one person ever said, "I'm not your secretary!" And refused to make the call for me.

Even though they knew the reason why?

Oh yes. I actually - he actually - afterwards he became quite a good friend. I think it was a bad day or something. He actually got quite high up. But, this then led me to start thinking how can I cope with meetings? Because I did try the taking notes bit, but colleagues, it was a different thing, because if they wanted to take part in the meeting they would forget to take notes for me and I would miss out and I was so far behind even so I could never make any contribution because everything had moved on. Now I had a friend called Annette Rawson who worked for the Department of Health, and she said "have you ever thought about using a lipspeaker?" I'd never heard of them before. Didn't know what they were. She explained. They were people who repeated what was said without voice so that the deaf person could follow. So, my boss by that time was Joyce Butcher the person who'd gone back to the States, then she'd come back to marry an Englishman so she was back with us again. And I said I've heard about these people called lip speakers, I think they would help me take part in meetings. So, she said, "well, tell you what we'll put 100 pounds in your budget and see how it goes", so I had 100 pounds in my budget for this, and of course it was a revelation because with the lipspeaker I was keeping up, I was following what everybody was saying and I was actually now being able to participate in these meetings, to make points in these meetings. So everybody realised what a difference this was making. I had control of my own budget. It went up and up and up and by the time I finished work my lipspeaker budget was getting on for £2000 a year.

How many meetings were you having to attend?

Oh well quite a few. There were 2 or 3 a week quite often. I never did this through Access to Work. This started long before access to work was available and when this came in they thought should we switch over to this? But, once you've got something in your budget it's much easier to roll it over, and we thought the danger was if I moved to access to work funding and the rules of that changed I'm never going to get it back in my own budget again

and we thought it was safer to keep it to my own budget so I never applied for access to work. It always came out of my own budget right the way through. Of course

[41:28]

I'm wondering shall we take a break, we've been going 50 minutes. We're just going to take a short break. I'm going to pause recording for now

[break in recording]

OK. We've just come back from a short break. Now, Ross, you were telling us about your career, which has been absolutely fantastic. You've mentioned the difficulties you faced having the deafness and just before the break you were mentioning about the lipspeaker and what a revelation that's been to you. Is there anything else you want to talk about that before I move on to a slightly different subject?

What I should have said is that I started my career, as I said, with the British National Bibliography which was of course a private firm, and that's why I became head of the Dewey section just like that. Now, in 1973, BNB became one of the constituent parts of the newly formed British Library. So, for the rest of my career I was actually a member of the British Library staff, though doing much the same work as I had been doing before, so obviously I'd been fortunate to be able to work for the National Library, which means that I really have been in sort of the centre of things and this had been extremely useful to me. When the new British Library building was being built at St Pancras initially we would go to work there, but because the funding did not really materialise, it was decided that all the posts that did not have to be in London would move up to the Yorkshire site where they had room to build new buildings on land that the library owned. So in fact 850 jobs moved from London to Yorkshire and one of them was mine, so that's why after living in London for 20 years I moved up to Yorkshire in 1990. Now, then the Disability Discrimination Act came in, in 1995, and obviously the library had to follow that, so they set up a completely new post of Disabled Staff Liaison Officer.

That's a bit of a mouthful.

It was. DSLO. And, there was one fairly obvious candidate for that post. I didn't have to go do selection board for that one either! But one benefit of that was I had that role for the whole of the library, all site's so not just Yorkshire but the new St Pancras site, the newspaper library at Collingdale, all over, so I actually got to know the whole of the British Library buildings extremely well because I had contact with disabled staff in every single part and that was quite an interesting job because the library was by this time wholly committed to making sure that the library was disability aware, so, for instance as part of the induction courses for everybody joining the library, I would give a 5 minute - only 5 minutes, a bit short, but at least it was there, to say if you are a disabled person please tell us, we want to do what we can to help. So it was a good body to actually be employed by. I was also very fortunate that my Dewey work became very well-known. There has always been a Dewey Decimal Committee in the UK and I was first made a member of that in 1969. Now I took early retirement from the British library when I was 53. That was 1998, I think, because I got a very good deal, so off I went. I've not regretted doing it for an instant but I didn't give up my Dewey work and actually I then became Chairman of the UK Dewey Committee and I remained Chairman of that until actually last year when I finally decided it was time for me to step down. That's actually been very interesting because I was obviously the only deaf person on that, so I was a deaf person chairing a Committee of hearing people. I used a lip speaker for all those meetings as well, but I think I actually had done my bit to make the library world aware of deafness.

[47:35]

Can I ask what was the general attitude of all of your colleagues when you're having these lip speakers, you're having various other adjustments as well, were they happy to work with you or were any issues?

As I say, generally speaking, yes, everybody has been very, very supportive indeed because they realise what a difference it made, it meant I could contribute because I used to actually give Dewey courses as well. I've done lots and lots of Dewey courses to library groups all over the UK. I used to 'have a lipspeaker will travel' and we used to turn up in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Bristol and of course it was a revelation to most of the people on those courses because they had never met a deaf person using a lipspeaker before and they certainly never expected to be given a course by somebody who was deaf. Generally speaking

everybody has been brilliant. Not only that, lots of them would talk to the lipspeaker as well and ask about what they were doing. So it actually was great deaf awareness exercise.

Can I just ask, did the fact you had had a teacher who was deaf give you any inspiration to do the teaching and the lecturing yourself? Did it make it easier for you to do it?

I've always been a bit of a show off, I think that is what it is. I like having a captive audience, as you can see. And therefore, I love presenting because I love being able to pass on things to other people and in fact usually with these courses which I did for what was then the library association they would give feedback forms and the most common feedback was that I got over my passion for the subject, which is true. It's a very warped mind that has a passion for classification numbers, but there it is. On the other hand I do think that my deafness has perhaps still held me back in some ways. I had a very good career. I have no regrets at all, but I never really rose above the middle management level. Now also people at my level usually are on interview boards. I never did one I was never asked to be on an interview board and I don't think I could ever have gone up to the next level which was director level because I think my deafness would have been regarded as too much of a barrier for me to make that extra step, so I do think if I had not been deaf may be I would have gone a bit further, whether I would have wanted to have done so I don't know. I've enjoyed what I did, but I think my deafness did just hold me back a bit.

[51:44]

So, you've told me about your wonderful career. Your parents, who obviously were devastated at the very beginning thinking you had no career, what was your continuing relationship with you?

Oh well of course they were so pleased with what happened, they were extremely proud of me and I mean when I started having articles published in journals, of course my mother had a copy which she would show round to all her friends. Of course they couldn't understand a word of the article. It would have been in Greek to them. Oh my parents were extremely proud of me and very, very supportive. My mother died when she was 79, and my father went on until he was 91. So he lived to a great age. Actually, my father married for a second time because we'd had very old family friends and Eileen had been a bridesmaid at my parents

wedding. Now, Eileen's husband died and my mother died, and they got on very well together, so they decided they would get married. That was a year after my mother died. My father was 84 and Eileen was 83 and Peter, Eileen's son, gave her away and I was my father's best man, so that was marvellous.

May I ask where the honeymoon was?

Do you know I cannot remember! I think they went to Devon or somewhere like that. Oh they had a honeymoon, oh believe me they had a honeymoon.

What about your personal life if I may ask? Have you got a partner?

Yes, I have. I am actually gay and I have had the same male partner, Barry, for 40 years. We celebrated our ruby anniversary last year. Obviously when we joined up conditions for gay people were very, very different than they are now, so at that time at work I didn't say anything about this. It's only in the last 10 years or so I've been a lot more open and I think most of my ex-work colleagues know, a lot of them had even met Barry, because there had been occasions when my lipspeaker has been ill and Barry has actually come up to work to do some lipspeaking for me and certainly everybody in the deaf world or most people in the deaf world know about him and we were able to register civil partnership in 2006 a year after it became possible to do so. I think we were one of the first couples in Leeds to actually do so. It was a very small ceremony with only two other people there. Our next door neighbour and my lipspeaker as the other witness so that if there was any problems during the service she could act as lipspeaker as well, but she did not need to do so. Barry is a hearing person and he has tried to a great extent to stay out of the deaf world. He sometimes says I don't like the deaf people, but I don't think he really means that, but actually he's been to quite a few different things, so he knows a great deal about deafness now and he's been very supportive but it also means he can give me a very different view on things because he's coming at this from a hearing person's perspective. Obviously, to living in a mixed household is quite useful. It's quite useful having a hearing partner. He can sometimes answer the phone for me although he doesn't really like making phone calls for me. He says, "well, you've got text relay, you've got a text phone, why don't you do it for yourself?" So he likes to make sure I don't put things on to him too much.

[57:25]

Would you mind if I go back to the 1960s and I'm just trying to get an idea of what the situation must have been like for you at the time. You are gay and you are deaf. You are trying get a career. That's a lot of challenges you have to overcome. Would you mind talking more about that?

Yes, the gay one wasn't so much of a challenge because I just did not talk about this at that time. It was there in the background, but also there was a social worker at the RNID at that time who was himself gay who introduced me to a number of his own friends. He used to have riotous parties at his flat and quite a number of them were people who had been couples for many years. I remembered one couple Jack and Jimmy they had been partners for over 30 years, so it was through him that I did meet quite a number of other stable partnerships, so Barry and I were not completely on our own if you see what I mean. But it was not something at that time I really talked about. To this day, I don't really know if my parents knew. I don't think my mother did. My father probably did. I never actually talked about it with them.

[59:14]

You mentioned a little while ago that Barry doesn't get involved with the deaf world and you've mentioned that phrase a few times yourself. Have you got involved with the deaf world at all?

Very much so. You might say too much so. It's interesting this because when I was starting work I was far more involved with getting ahead. My work was my life. I had no time for anything else and apart from using lipspeakers and as I say up until then I didn't even know who they were, I had no involvement with the deaf world apart from the National Deaf Children's Society. My father was in that. Then I actually got to know somebody called Freddy Bloom, through her daughter Jenny who was also deaf and Freddy had been a president of the NDCS, and was on their board for a couple of years. But that was all sort of one off thing. But then in the mid 1980s there was another person working at the British Library called Alison Heath. Alison felt she like me was a deafened person with an acquired, profound acquired hearing loss. In fact Alison went on to become one of the first cochlear

implant users in the UK. But Alison felt that the various deaf bodies were not doing anything for deafened people. So, she decided to set up her own group and it was Alison, a hearing therapist called Bunty Levene who is still involved with Hearing Concern LINK and another deafened person called Martin Tiernan who is still a very good friend. They met and decided to set up this group. They held an inaugural meeting in London in 1984 chaired by Jack Ashley which became the National Association of Deafened People. Now, because Alison was a work colleague she very much twisted my arm and said "you've got to join this" so I agreed to do this. I was interested in email. That was my main interest there was something in those days called Telecom Gold run by BT which was an old prototype email system and there was a deaf email group run by Breakthrough which is now deafPLUS, but they were called Breakthrough then, called BKU - and then the RNID was set up and its own email group called XXCH - and I joined that and it was through that I agreed to join the NADP's technical committee. Now the board at that time they were doing a couple of times that I didn't think were right I was quite openly critical of what they were doing so they said "well if you think that can you do any better, mate?" In other words put your money where your mouth is. So what could I do? I had to accept that challenge so I became a trustee. And it was a couple of years after that that Alison Heath resigned. Sheila Saville became Chairman and I agreed to become Vice-Chairman. Sheila only stayed as chair for 3 months and I, having taken on post of Vice-Chairman as what I thought was a cushy sinecure, found myself as Chairman and I remained as Chairman of NADP for 5 years then. Then I stood down and became Vice-Chairman. Then Heather Jackson and when Heather sadly died from cancer very suddenly I became Chairman for the second time which I still am, so actually I've been involved with NADP since 1984. But I've been Chairman for quite a bit of that time. That was one. The second one was as I say very interested in email and of course about that time they set up the telephone exchange for deaf people in the basement at RNID still living in London then and I was one of the users of that. That eventually became RNID Typetalk which is has now changed its name again to Text Relay. So, I was involved with that. Now, we thought that we were getting nowhere with text communication for deaf people. This was about 1985/86 because the different groups were saying different things to government and to BT. So, two of us went for a meeting with Mike Wicklam who was then Chief Executive of RNID and said we need somewhere to bring everybody together and Mike agreed to provide some funding to set up what became the telecommunications action group which was called TAG and I was one of the founder members of TAG. I became secretary of TAG in 1993 and I'm still secretary of TAG now, a very long time. So, most of the major

deaf bodies, British Deaf Association, Hearing Concern LINK, RNID, Sense, deafPLUS, NADP - they're all members of TAG. So, I've been heavily involved in that one since 1993.

[01:06:16]

The other one I did get involved is because of the fact that I now started to use lip speakers and because then when I became involved with the National Association of Deafened People I learned about the wonders of palantype which we later knew as speech-to-text because of there being Stenograph as well, but palantype ruled the roost in those days. I started to get to think I need to know more about how these people are trained. So, I became a lipspeaking examiner for what was then the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People, which is now Signature. Now, they set up a working group on lip-speaking which I became a member of. And then Stuart Simpson who was the Chief Executive of CACDP, now Chairman of Hearing Concern LINK of course, he wanted to do something similar for speech-to-text reporters so set up a working group for that which Sheila chaired initially but then asked me to chair. This went through various different forms, but eventually it became the lipspeaking qualifications Committee and speech-to-text and notetaking qualifications Committee, and I was asked to chair both of those. And they both carried an automatic place on the Board of Trustees. So I became a member of the CACDP board. I always told them I ought to have 2 votes because I was representing 2 chairs, but they would only let me have one vote. Shame. Because I could actually have ended up voting against myself if one of the Committees I chaired had a different view from the other one. So I had vote yes for one, and no the other, which would have been huge fun. So I actually then - Heather Jackson was Vice-Chairman of CACDP when her term of office came to an end I was asked to become Vice-Chairman of CACDP, which I was for about 3 years, so as I can see yes I have become very heavily involved. Another thing that I did was on the Telecoms side. OFTEL that was the office of telecommunications had a Committee called the disabled and elderly Committee. David Hyslop who used to work for Breakthrough was coming off that and put my name forward to take his place, so I became a member of the OFTEL disabled and elderly Committee. When OFTEL become Ofcom that changed to the Advisory Committee on Older and Disabled People and I applied for that and I was a member of that for 4 years as well, so I've been representing deaf people for both OFTEL and Ofcom.

[01:09:52]

You've been involved in many different levels on a wide variety of organisations. Would you say that the services that are provided to different types of deaf people have improved, stayed the same or got worse since the time when you lost your hearing back in the 1960s?

Oh definitely improved. I mean, because at that time everything was much more low-key. Basically the only one doing anything much at that time was the RNID and I think now you have so much more - you have so much more support for deafened people. Now, if I was going to university I would automatically have either a notetaker or a speech-to-text reporter. You certainly wouldn't have - you didn't have those things then. I would be able to claim those things by right. Similarly I think - to me two biggest advances for deafened people over the years are subtitles on TV, and telephones - and textphones and relay services. I've been involved with both to some extent because I've been a member of the Deaf Broadcasting Council for many years but I've been far more involved on the relay service side because when the RNID was thinking of setting up Typetalk, they appointed somebody called Brian Bell to do this. He was the first director. And I first met Brian when Typetalk was a desk and two chairs in Merseyside Centre for Deaf People. And so it something I've been very, very, very keen on. I was Chairman of the Typetalk consumer panel for 10 years, so I was very heavily involved and I feel that the existence of the relay service has been such a boon for deaf people. It's given us independence, the ability to make these phone calls, and of course subtitles on TV with the BBC now having a commitment to 100 per cent subtitling and perhaps others are gradually increasing, it means we have access we just would not have dreamed of back in the sixties.

[01:12:54]

What about the NHS? Do you feel that attitudes and support from doctors audiologists et cetera has improved, stayed the same or got worse?

I think it's patchy, I think all depends where you are. I think some places are a lot better than others and I think too, dare I say it can depend on the actions of the deaf people themselves. I think I've got my own GP surgery fairly well-trained. They all know I'm deaf. My own doctor when it's my turn he always comes out, stands in front of me and says "Mr. Trotter" because he knows he has to. OK and when I lived in London the GP there he was lovely. He

was a lovely person. But, sometimes you go to the hospital and find sometimes the nurses are a lot better than the doctors are. But again me being me, the first thing I do when I go there I say "I am deaf, I want that put in large letters on the front of my file, I want everybody told that I do not hear if my name is called, you've got to come and fetch me" now OK this is because I am me, I make sure that things do work to my benefit, but I also know a lot of deaf people don't have the confidence to do these things and for them I don't think things are nearly as good as they ought to be. It's improving but it's patchy and there is a lot more work to be done.

Thank you for that last comment. I am aware that unfortunately our time is drawing to a close. Is there anything in particular you would like to relate to us before we finish the interview?

I'm trying to think if there is anything I had missed out. I think we have covered the ground pretty well. What I would say is in some ways I think I regard myself as being fortunate to be deaf. Now this may seem a very strange thing to say. I mean OK I would love to have my hearing back. I've never been for cochlear implant but I would love to hear music again. I miss music very much. I was always very keen on ballet. I used to go to Covent Garden to watch ballet a lot. I put my own music to it from watching steps on stage so I miss that but on the other hand being deaf has picked me out from the crowd. When I was at university I lived in a hall of residence. Now, if you said to lot of the people in that hall "do you know Ross?" They say "Ross? I don't think so." "do you know the guy who was deaf?" "Oh yes," they knew who it was, they knew it was me, so being deaf picked me out. It made me different. And also I've met so many friends, so many people whose friendship I'm so pleased to have, so many inspiring people, people like Heather Jackson being one of them who I would never have met at all if I had not been deaf that in some ways I think it's a good thing.

Thank you very much indeed and I'm going to close the interview now at 20 to 12.

[End of recording]