New media technologies and changing concepts of D/deafness in Britain, 1925-1960

Rachel Caroline Garratt

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science

December 2022

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Graeme Gooday at the University of Leeds and Esme Cleall at the University of Sheffield. It is difficult to describe how much their unwavering support, guidance and understanding have meant to me during the tumultuous four years of this project. There were many moments when completing this thesis felt impossible, but their brilliance as academics and mentors got me through. I am forever grateful.

This research was funded by the White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities as part of the interdisciplinary Electronic Soundscapes research network. I want to thank everyone involved in the creation of this network and for designing three unique PhD studentship projects. In particular, I would like to thank the founding members David Clayton and Emilie Morin from the University of York, Esme Cleall and Beryl Pong from the University of Sheffield and Graeme Gooday and James Mooney from the University of Leeds. I am also grateful to my fellow PhD students on the network, Marta Donati and Jean-Baptiste Masson, whose support and friendship have been invaluable.

Thank you to everyone at the former Action on Hearing Loss Library in London, especially Dominic Stiles, for being so enthusiastic and helpful during the early days of my research. I conducted much of the archival work in this thesis during the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic. I want to thank everyone at the British Library, National Archives and BFI Reuben Library who made it possible to work safely and effectively under incredibly trying conditions. Massive thanks are also owed to Emily Rees for very generously proofreading this thesis at short notice.

Finally, I could not have done this project without my amazingly supportive family and friends. Thank you all for your support and for keeping my spirits up, but mostly for always making me laugh. This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful parents, Dave and Millie Garratt – none of this would have been possible without you.

Abstract

In the early-mid twentieth century, British audiences engaged with the cultural forums of radio, 'talkie' cinema and television in ever-increasing numbers. For deaf and hard of hearing audiences, the popularisation of these social, cultural, and technological developments simultaneously posed new challenges and opportunities. I argue that ideas about deafness and the cultural forums were constructed through the ways in which members of the deaf community and the hearing public discussed engagement. I assert that how members of these communities chose or were encouraged to engage with the cultural forums not only highlighted divisions and diversity in the British deaf community. It also constructed new ideas of what it meant to be deaf and how radio, cinema and television could be used. Running alongside this, successful attempts by the blind community in Britain to gain radio access exposed the differences in how the government and the public thought of deafness compared to other perceived disabilities.

In this thesis, I combine histories of deafness (including hard of hearing people and the Deaf community) with histories of media and technology. By undertaking the first systematic study of the interaction of deaf people with new media sound technologies in twentieth-century Britain, I reveal the diversity of responses within the deaf community. I also investigate how prominent organisations such as the National Institute for the Deaf, British Deaf Association, and popular deaf journals either encouraged or dismissed the technologies, at times using them as a lens through which to raise awareness of the difficulties deaf people faced. Within many D/deaf histories, discussion of access to media is dated as beginning in the 1970s at the earliest. I argue, however, that these debates took place much earlier, and my study of the three cultural forums between 1925-1960 has uncovered a vast array of opinions and reactions to them.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Full Title	Abbreviation
The National Institute for the Deaf	NID
The Royal National Institute for the Deaf	RNID
The British Deaf Association	BDA
The Royal National Institute for the Blind	RNIB
St Dunstan's Home for Blinded Veterans	St Dunstan's
The British Deaf Times	*BDT*
The Deaf Quarterly News	*DQN*
The British Deaf News	*BDN*
The Silent World	*TSW*
The St Dunstan's Review	*SDR*
The New Beacon	*TNB*

Notes on Terminology

The terms 'Deaf' and 'deaf' represent distinct identities within the D/deaf community. Deaf refers to those who communicate using sign language and consider themselves members of a linguistic minority rather than disabled. On the other hand, there are members of the D/deaf community who feel deafness is a disability, and so identify as lowercase deaf.

This distinction evolved after the era of this thesis (1925-1960). Therefore, when I use the phrases deaf, deaf community or deafness, I am referring to the larger, more fluid community that existed during the era, encompassing different types of deafness and identities.

Where I refer to later communities, identities, and scholarship, I use the standard, inclusive format of D/deaf, D/deafness and D/deaf community. When using 'D/deaf I am referring to all types of D/deafness and D/deaf identities.

Timeline of Events

1926	Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill
1929	Wireless for the Blind Fund
1930	Talkie cinema popularised
1932	British Deaf Associations Cinema Scheme
1944	British Deaf Associations Cinema Scheme ends
1950	*Morning Departure* captioned film screening
1951	NID focus groups for cinema hearing aids begin
1952	First *Children's Hour* accessible television broadcast
1953	Television for the Deaf Fund
1961	Television for the Deaf Fund ends

Chapter 1: Introduction

Historians of British social and cultural history have highlighted the radio, 'talkie' cinema, and domestic television as examples of major social, cultural, and technological developments.[1] Brett Bebber, for example, characterises all three as facilitating twentieth-century mass culture, civic engagement, and social participation. However, whilst such scholars have emphasised the importance of audiences in shaping the role and significance of these media, the audiences that they depict are overwhelmingly non-disabled and hearing. Very little secondary literature exists on how D/deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with these three technologies between 1925-1960, and the focus has instead been on developments in the late twentieth century. Where such literature does discuss deaf and hard of hearing audiences, historians such as Peter Jackson and Margaret Deuchar have labelled them as either exclusionary or enabling, stopping short of any discussion on the diversity and complexity of the deaf community and their interactions with radio, cinema, and television.[2]

Blind people's engagement with media technologies has been researched in more depth. In his history of audiobooks, Matthew Rubery investigated blind veterans' use of books recorded on gramophone records.[3] Others, such as Rebecca Scales, have compared radio schemes for blind and D/deaf people in interwar France. She concludes that blind people used radio to demonstrate their ability and determination, whilst deafened veterans wanted their struggles recognised.[4] This correlates with Graeme Gooday and Karen Sayer's argument that blind people in Britain received far greater sympathy and support than their deaf counterparts, something of critical strategic importance to D/deaf campaigners as they attempted to elevate public and government awareness of the needs of deaf and hard of hearing people. As I will demonstrate, they tried to do this through the lens of access to

---

[1] Brett Bebber, ed., *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting Volume One 1922-1939* (Cambridge MA: Basil Blackwell Inc, 1991), 1; Michael Chanan, *The Dream That Kicks – The Prehistory and Early Years of Cinema in Britain*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1996); Simon Popple and Joe Kember, *Early Cinema: From Factory Gate to Dream Factory* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004); Michele Hilmes, ed., *The Television History Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2003); Helen Wheatley, ed., *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

[2] Peter W Jackson, *Britain's Deaf Heritage* (Haddington: Pentland Press, 1990).
Margaret Deuchar, *British Sign Language* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

[3] Matthew Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2016), p. 59.

[4] Rebecca Scales, *Radio and the Politics of Sound in Interwar France, 1921-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 90.

media technologies.[5] I build upon the comparison set out by previous scholars by comparing how blind and deaf people interacted with radio. In doing this, I will further prove the discrepancies in how deaf people were treated compared to members of the blind community and how attempts to draw connections between certain groups and media technology could be either successful or unsuccessful. I will also establish why, when members of the deaf community struggled to access cinema and television, they frequently referred to the privileges blind people had been given.

Deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with radio, cinema, and television from 1925-1960 has been overlooked by historians of technology and D/deafness. While technological developments have been considered regarding deafness, these tend to be focused on hearing aids and other amplificatory auditory technology, which have been seen as both ameliorative and threatening to deafness and deaf culture. Bringing together histories of deafness (including hard of hearing people as well as the Deaf community) and social and cultural accounts of engagement with audio technologies in the mid-twentieth century, this thesis breaks new ground in shedding light both on the deaf community in this period and on how disabled people engaged with new media. The focus of this thesis will be deaf and hard of hearing adults and children outside of educational settings. It will track how ideas of deafness, the British deaf community, and the technologies themselves were shaped and changed throughout the era.

As radio, cinema, and television contained audio elements to differing degrees, deaf and hard of hearing people and the organisations around them had to negotiate how – or if – to engage with them. Various members of prominent deaf organisations and journals claimed authority on matters concerning deaf people and the three cultural forums. I will explore this using a vast range of source materials. These include institutional documents from the National Institute for the Deaf (NID) and British Deaf Association (BDA).The British Deaf Association, previously the British Deaf and Dumb Association, was founded in 1890 in response to various attempts to reduce the use of sign language in Britain.[6] It was founded by deaf people who used sign language and wanted to advance and protect the interests of

[5] Graeme Gooday and Karen Sayer, *Managing the Experience of Hearing Loss in Britain, 1830-1930* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 48.
[6] Brian Grant, *The Deaf Advance: A History of the British Deaf Association 1890-1990* (Edinburgh: The Pentland Press Ltd., 1990), p. 13.

people like themselves.[7] Meanwhile, The National Institute for the Deaf was established in 1911 as the National Bureau for Promoting the General Welfare of the Deaf, becoming the NID in 1925.[8] The founders of the NID were concerned with a broader spectrum of the deaf and hard of hearing community, including those who developed hearing loss later in life. It was not opposed to speech and lipreading being encouraged as an alternative to sign language.[9]

I have also consulted a key part of the deaf cultural landscape during the years 1925-1960, the popular deaf journals of the era. These were *The British Deaf Times, Deaf Quarterly News, Deaf News* and *The Silent World*. The *Deaf Quarterly News,* established 1915, became *Deaf News* in 1951. It had originally been a regional newspaper in Yorkshire but became a national journal as the twentieth century progressed.[10] The publications were closely aligned with the BDA, with many members of the organisation contributing to the journal. Therefore, they mainly catered towards and reported upon matters relating to profoundly deaf, sign language users.[11] Meanwhile, *The British Deaf Times* covered a broader range of the British deaf community, including articles and news reports on a wide variety of topics including sign language, lipreading and assistive technologies. All three journals merged into *The British Deaf News* in 1955 to streamline communication in the deaf community, especially around news and social events.[12] Whilst still reporting on a range of topics within the deaf community, *The British Deaf News* was closely aligned to the BDA.[13] The other large organisation for deaf welfare, the NID, established its in-house journal, *The Silent World,* in 1946.[14] Unlike *The British Deaf News* and its predecessors, the NID stated openly that the aim of *The Silent World* would be to include members a broad spectrum of deaf and hard of hearing people, as well as appeal to those who identified as hearing.[15] This stance, which was contrary to the character of many of the previously mentioned journals, may have encouraged their merger, creating a strong alternative to *The Silent World.*

[7] Ibid.
[8] RNID, 'Our History', RNID < https://rnid.org.uk/about-us/our-history/> [accessed 18 July 2023].
[9] Ibid.
[10] See Appendix 1.
[11] Atherton, p. 80.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1945-6,* 1946, p. 13.
[15] Ibid.

Additionally, I have searched online newspaper archives for articles relating to deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with radio, cinema, and television. My analysis of these sources has also revealed how organisations such as the NID mediated deaf people's engagement with the three cultural forums. I will uncover how prominent individuals and organisations framed engagement with certain technologies within the deaf community and the gradual process by which different opinions and methods of engagement were shaped between the years 1925-1960.

Whilst exploring how the topic of radio, talkie cinema, and television were discussed within official documents of deaf organisations, popular deaf journals of the era, and mainstream press articles, I will question the consequences of several initiatives aiming to connect certain groups with specific technologies. Irene Leigh has written on how deafness and a plurality of D/deaf identities have been actively constructed by individuals' and outside communities' understanding of the biological, psychological, and social aspects of D/deafness.[16] In this thesis, I argue that the discourse around initiatives to provide deaf and hard of hearing people with access to radio, cinema and television shaped how deafness was constructed within the deaf community and broader society. As I will demonstrate, disparities between who could and could not – or did not want to – engage with electrical audio technologies became more evident and value-laden as the twentieth century progressed. These developments can be connected to the emergence of later D/deaf identities that continue to evolve today.[17]

The project initially proposed in my studentship funding was titled 'Enabling or Disabling? Deaf responses to new audio technology in the early twentieth century'. The project's scope was to question ableism in audio media history as part of a broader project on electronic soundscapes in the twentieth century. However, far more complex questions emerged upon exploring material on radio, cinema, and television. These included how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with radio, cinema, and television, how this engagement was mediated, and how discussions around engagement shaped ideas of both deafness and the media themselves. In examining a large section of the twentieth century – 1925-1960 – I have

[16] Irene Leigh, *A Lens on Deaf Identities*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 4.
[17] For clarity on the use of 'D/deaf' please refer to the glossary in the front matter of this thesis, or the more detailed explanation on page 24 of this introduction.

uncovered consistent themes and connections between the discussions and debates surrounding each technology.

Whilst under the umbrella of the history of technology and media history, I have elected to refer to the three technologies as cultural forums. This terminology arises from Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch's work on the cultural forum model.[18] In their study of television, they define a cultural forum as a phenomenon around which multiple meanings, ideologies, and conclusions can be formed.[19] Later works within media studies have also used their terminology and model to explore developments such as the internet and how cultural forums can be used to reflect and project activism.[20] I represent radio, cinema and television as cultural forums because I am not only examining engagement with the hardware of the technology but also the experiences surrounding them. The experiences in question were varied and they changed over the course of my thesis.

In examining the primary source material that I have uncovered, my first line of enquiry was to establish if members of the British deaf community engaged with radio, cinema, and television from 1925 to 1960. I also explore blind people's engagement with radio to draw comparisons with the experiences of the deaf community. Furthermore, after establishing that deaf and hard of hearing people did engage with the cultural forums, I investigate the methods they used and how this exposed controversies around communication, accessibility, and exclusion within the deaf community. Between 1925 and 1960, assistive technology such as electronic hearing aids became more sophisticated, allowing some members of the deaf community to engage with the cultural forums. Meanwhile, there were individuals within the deaf community who could not utilise assistive technology or actively rejected it – for example those who rejected radio, as I explore in Chapter Three, or those using the British Deaf Association cinema scheme in Chapter Four – excluding them from engaging with mainstream cultural forums.

---

[18] Horace Newcomb and Paul M Hirsch, 'Television as a Cultural Forum', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 8 (1983), 45-55 (pp. 45-55).
[19] Ibid.
[20] Laurena Bernabo, 'Expanding Television's Cultural Forum in the Digital Era: Prime Time Television, Twitter, and Black Lives Matter', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 63 (2019), 63(1), 77–93 (pp. 77-93).
Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Rasmus Helles, 'The internet as a cultural forum: Implications for research', *New Media and Society*, 13 (2011) 517–533 (pp. 517-533).

The diversity and complexity of the British deaf community became increasingly apparent as the twentieth century progressed. For example, organisations such as the NID and BDA aligned themselves with subgroups within the community, and officials within them offered differing ideas on how or if specific cultural-technological forums should be engaged with. The discourse around cinema and television between members of the deaf community highlighted new divisions and emphasised that the sound element of the forums had created thresholds for who could and could not engage with them. By the 1960s, no deaf organisation, journals or mainstream media outlets could give a blanket imperative of how or if deaf and hard of hearing people should engage with radio, cinema, and television.

The question of how influential actors within the British deaf community tried to present engagement with the three cultural forums informed my second research question, that of how organisations, journals, and mainstream press mediated the discussion of such engagement. The NID and BDA were united on their stance that radio was of little use to members of the deaf community, something that the editorial teams of deaf journals such as the *British Deaf Times* and *Deaf Quarterly News* (*BDT* AND *DQN* respectively) essentially agreed with.[21] The introduction of talkie cinema split opinion, however, and the NID, BDA and deaf journals began to mediate how or if deaf people should engage with talkies, with the NID encouraging those who could use assistive technology to engage and the BDA facilitating access to silent films. As domestic television became more popular in the 1950s, the NID attempted to campaign for free television licences and accessible broadcasts for deaf people with minimal success. This demonstrates that by the end of the timeframe of this thesis, there was too much division in the British deaf community to shape a consensus on deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with the cultural forums.

The final strand of inquiry I undertake is to explore how ideas about deafness were constructed through the ways in which members of the deaf community and the hearing public discussed their engagement with the cultural forums. Simultaneously, how the deaf community addressed this engagement shaped perceptions of the cultural forums and their utility to deaf people. This was sometimes in terms of the forum's hardware but more often in reference to how they were considered within the deaf community. I argue that both deafness

[21] Radio was commonly referred to as the 'wireless' in the UK in the early-mid twentieth century. However, in order to distinguish radio from other wireless technologies, I have elected to use the former term.

and the cultural forums were co-constructed around each other, and as the deaf community fractured, this process of co-construction took place in multiple ways across the community and outside of it.

1.1. Historiography and approaches

In the research of the few historians that have addressed deaf issues in the history of communications technology, little attention has been paid to deaf and hard of hearing people as users of technology and their role in how it developed. However, what work has been done is insightful and has formed the foundations of my approach in this thesis. . The research undertaken by Coreen McGuire on the amplified telephone in interwar Britain is highly relevant.[22] She argues that the telephone 'became a tool for identifying and categorising hearing loss,' as 'the ability to hear normally was both defined and moderated by the telephone'.[23] There are many aspects of McGuire's approach which I expand upon in this thesis. Her work establishes how a previous instance of deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with an emerging technology resulted in new thresholds for deafness and the co-construction of both deafness and technology. McGuire is amongst a growing group of scholars taking different approaches to the combined histories of D/deafness and science.[24] Here I will establish the existing literature that led to new approaches and how I have approached the topic of how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with new cultural forums in the twentieth century.

1.1i. New media technologies in Britain

Whilst historians have presented audiences of radio, cinema, and television as overwhelmingly hearing, much scholarship exists on the development of cultural forums and their uptake in Britain. I will explore that literature and how mainstream, hearing audiences engaged with the cultural forums.

---

[22] Coreen McGuire, *Measuring Difference, Numbering Normal, Setting the Standards for Disability in the Interwar Period* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).
Coreen McGuire, 'Inventing Amplified Telephony: The Co-Creation of Aural Technology and Disability, in *Rethinking Modern Prosthesis in Anglo-American Commodity Cultures, 1820-1939*, ed. by Claire L Jones (Manchester, Michigan: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 70-90 (pp. 70-90).
[23] McGuire, *Measuring Difference,* p. 5.
[24] Ibid.

The invention of wireless communication has been well documented within the history of science and technology and media studies.[25] Here I briefly demonstrate this; however, more relevant to this thesis is the body of work on how people in Britain responded to and engaged with wireless radio receivers and broadcasts.[26] Invisible electromagnetic radiation, which formed the foundation of radio technology, was discovered in Germany in the late nineteenth century.[27] There were many international experiments with the technology and telegraphs were invented in 1898.[28] In Britain, the state took control of radio technology, primarily for national defence purposes, for example, by the navy or coastal rescue services.[29] Further experiments with the technology resulted in the wireless broadcast of sound through transmitters and receivers.

The 1904 Wireless Telegraphy Act decreed that transmitters and receivers would be licenced through the Post Office.[30] Sensing a sizable domestic market, a small group of radio manufacturers applied to the Post Office for permission to broadcast. The 'unrestrained' commercial broadcasting in the USA concerned the Post Office. Not only was there little regulation on who could broadcast, but there were technical difficulties with having too many radio signals overlapping.[31] It was agreed that manufacturers would group together to negotiate, forming the British Broadcasting Company, or BBC.[32] Any radio manufacturer could join the company by buying shares for £1. They were licenced to broadcast in November 1922, and listeners could pay 10 shillings to the Post Office for a licence.[33] Within two years a vast array of programmes were being produced and broadcast, including news, educational talks, speciality programmes aimed at women and children and music.[34]

---

[25] Rowland F Pocock, *The early British radio industry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).
Scannell and Cardiff, (1991).
Glen Creeber, 'The Origins of Public Service Broadcasting' in *The Television History Book*, ed. by Michele Hilmes (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 23-34, pp. 23-34.
[26] Scannell and Cardiff, (1991).
Robert Silvey, *Who's Listening? The Story of BBC Audience Research* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1974).
[27] Pocock, p. 1.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., p. 18.
Ibid., p. 38.
[30] Scannell and Cardiff, p. 5.
[31] David Hendy, *The BBC: A People's History* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2022), p. 32.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., p. 5.
[34] Hendy, *The BBC*, p. 44.

The BBC held a monopoly over British broadcasting for 30 years, broken by the introduction of commercial television in 1955. The company's first General Manager was John Reith (1889-1971).[35] Much of the historiography of the BBC has focused on Reith and his beliefs about morality, education, and public service. The singular focus of this work excludes other factors. However, they demonstrate some of the values ascribed to radio and its potential uses. An aspect of broadcasting that Reith, alongside other senior figures at the BBC, was concerned with, was the standardisation of the English language in broadcasts.[36] The BBC Advisory Committee on Spoken English ran between 1926 and 1939. The committee decided that a southern English pronunciation should be the standard.[37] This may have helped with clarity of speech for deaf and hard of hearing people but would have stigmatised those who struggled with any speech let alone meeting the expectations but forward by the BBC.

During the early days of the BBC, politics was not included in the array of topics that were broadcast. During the General Strike of 1926, a national labour dispute, the BBC began to comment of current political affairs, although largely on the side of the government.[38] Due to the BBC's support of the government during the strike, it was granted a Royal Charter in 1926, becoming a corporation.[39] When the BBC became the British Broadcasting Corporation, it became a public company and answerable to Parliament. Whilst not technically state-controlled, the BBC's fate was dictated by the government, which determined its licence to broadcast and the cost of the licence fee.[40] Their relationship with the government meant that the BBC played a crucial role during the Second World War, spreading government messages as well as broadcasting comedy and music to boost morale.[41]

The hardware of radio sets evolved during the era of this thesis. In the early days, crystal sets, used with headphones, were easier and cheaper to build.[42] However, valve sets were the

---

[35] Ibid., p. 7-9.
[36] Jürg R. Schwyter, Dictating the Mob: The History of the BBC Advisory Committee on Spoken English (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 24.
[37] Ibid, p. 29.
Ibid., p. 30.
[38] Simon J. Potter, *This is the BBC: Entertaining the Nation, Speaking for Britain? 1922-2022* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 32.
[39] Ibid., p. 33.
Ibid., p. 40.
[40] Creeber, p. 23.
[41] Potter, p. 195-200.
[42] Scannell and Cardiff, p. 357.

norm by the end of the 1920s.[43] By 1938, three quarters of British households had a radio set.[44] The massive uptake of the cultural forum has resulted in many histories of how various groups engaged with it in the first half of the twentieth century; however, it has largely neglected deaf and hard of hearing peoples' experiences.

In the early days of radio, those experimenting with it were predominantly male radio hobbyists. Many of these were veterans who had tinkered with sets during the First World War.[45] In the 1920s, as radio sets were purchased or built for household use, men typically controlled the receivers and listened in using headphones, as was standard in that era.[46] This changed over time, as the scholarship reflects; Maggie Andrews has written about how radio became domesticated and taken up as a hobby by women, and how the BBC catered to this new audience.[47] Both Josephine Dolan and Stephen G Parker have uncovered the expectations set by the BBC regarding how children could and should engage with radio broadcasts, particularly regarding religious education.[48] Melanie Tebbut recounted issues of class and age in how people engaged with radio in the first half of the twentieth century.[49] Meanwhile, Pradip Ninan Thomas has explored imperial wireless schemes designed to keep the British Empire united following the First World War.[50] These works demonstrate that radio was a cultural forum around which people discussed and formed communities, identities, and representations.

This formation and shaping of identities also happened around cinema in Britain. Global experiments in developing filmed moving pictures and projecting them took place in the later nineteenth century. The most documented were by Edison in the USA and the Lumière brothers in France.[51] Popple and Kember write that cinema became popular in Britain from

---

[43] Ibid.
[44] David Hendy, 'Television's Pre-history: Radio', in *The Television History Book,* ed. by Michele Hilmes (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 4-6, p. 6.
[45] Scannell and Cardiff, p. 358.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Maggie Andrews, 'Homes Both Sides of the Microphone: the wireless and domestic space in inter-war Britain', *Women's History Review*, 21 (2012), 605–621 (pp. 605-621).
[48] Josephine Dolan, 'Aunties and uncles: the BBC's children's hour and liminal concerns in the 1920s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 23 (2003), 329-339 (pp. 329-339).
Stephen G Parker, 'Teach them to pray Auntie: "Children's hour prayers" at the BBC, 1940 – 1961', *History of Education*, 39 (2010), 659–676 (pp. 659–676).
[49] Melanie Tebbutt, 'Listening to Youth?: BBC Youth Broadcasts during the 1930s and the Second World War', *History Workshop Journal*, 84 (2017), 214-233 (pp. 214-233).
[50] Pradip Ninan Thomas, *Information Infrastructures in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 21-66.
[51] Chanan, p. 32.

1901 as intense modernisation and movement to urban areas led to the rapid growth of the middle class and the pursuit of popular entertainment.[52] In Britain, cinema was initially viewed in music halls, travelling fairgrounds, and a few small shopfronts.[53] By 1904, purpose-built 'picture palaces, which would become known as cinema theatres, were being built across Britain to hold film screenings, consisting of a block of various films.[54] The so-called 'big three' picture house companies in Britain were The Odeon, Gaumont-British and Associated British Cinemas.[55]

For this thesis, the use of sound and developments in audio technology is of huge significance. Early films were silent, often accompanied by live music. From 1910, however, sound engineers were experimenting with recorded soundtracks, including speech, that would be run alongside the film reels.[56] By 1922 they had improved both the audio quality and timing of these soundtracks and between the late 1920s and early 1930s, the so-called 'Talkies' became the standard in cinema.[57] Many cinema histories fail to note that film showings often had a sound element, usually live music scores that would differ between showings as cinemas chose their own accompaniment.[58] Talkies were popular with the mainstream, hearing audiences, with their introduction kicking off the so-called 'Golden Age' of cinema in the Western world, which lasted until the early 1940s.[59]

Young people and women made up a large proportion of cinema audiences in the first half of the twentieth century.[60] A 1946 survey found that 68% of 16 to 19-year-olds went to the cinema at least once a week, but only 11% of people over 60 did.[61] A London-based survey also found that 70% of cinema-going audiences were women and girls.[62] This can be attributed to the cheapness of cinema tickets – in the 1930s, over half of the cinema seats cost less than a sixpence – compared to other forms of leisure and entertainment, and the fact that

---

[52] Popple and Kember, p. 4.
[53] Ibid., p. 6.
[54] Ibid., p. 16.
[55] Brad Beaven, 'Going to the cinema: Mass commercial leisure and working-class cultures in 1930s Britain', in *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. by Brett Bebber (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 63-76 (p. 64).
[56] David Parkinson, *History of Film* (New York: Thames and Hudson,1995), pp. 83-84.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Martin Miller Marks, *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1985-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1997), pp. 3-9.
[59] Parkinson, p. 83.
[60] Beaven, p. 70.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

cinemas screen matinee performances as well as evening ones.[63] Social class was also a significant marker within cinema audiences, with working class people making up a large proportion of the audience. Due to this, some saw cinema as inferior to older forms of entertainment such as the theatre, but as Popple and Kember argue: 'Going to the cinema had become a regular occupation for most strata of British society, although its clientele was still predominantly working class […] it was fast becoming the nation's main entertainment and information source.'[64] Amongst the upper echelons of British society, there were concerns around morality and cinema, for example, whether young people would forego film showings for church on Sundays and whether the content in films fitted with contemporary standards of suitability.[65]

As with the radio and cinema, specialist television historians have written about the invention of television and how some portions of British society engaged with it. Television was invented by those trying to replicate radio broadcasts as a visual medium, experimenting with variable resistance to electricity, photoemission, and fluorescence.[66] Kelly Boyd has compared the BBCs innovations in a global context, writing that 'regularly broadcast television came to Britain earlier than anywhere else in the world, with the BBC providing daily viewing to the London area from 1936 until the declaration of war in 1939'.[67] The BBC transmitted two hours of programming from Alexandra Palace in London every day except Sundays. However, Glen Creeber confirms the limited geographical scope of the broadcasts, writing that 'it was received only within a radius of 400 miles by approximately 400 households.'[68] During the Second World War, the BBC stopped their limited broadcasting schedule, resuming it in 1946.[69]

---

[63] Ibid., pp. 69-72.
[64] Popple and Kember, p. 6.
[65] Chanan, p. 209.
[66] Brian Winston, 'The Development of Television', in *The Television History Book*, ed. by Michele Hilmes (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 9-12 (p. 9).
For a detailed history of the science and technology behind the development of television, I recommend Albert Abramson, *The History of Television 1880-1941* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1987).
[67] Kelly Boyd, 'The Western and British Identity on British Television in the 1950s', in *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. by Brett Bebber (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 109-115 (p. 109).
[68] Creeber, p. 25.
[69] Ibid., p. 30.

Following the war, the BBC improved the geographical reach of television transmissions. However, sets were still expensive, and their use rose slowly.[70] The coronation of Elizabeth II in June 1953 increased interaction as people gathered to watch one of the first televised national events.[71] Consequently, the number of television licences issued in the UK increased from 400,000 in 1950 to 110,0000 in 1953.[72] However, under pressure from commercial organisations seeking to exploit the mass market for the televisual medium, the government passed the Television Act of 1955, which allowed the BBC's monopoly on broadcasting to be broken, and an independent commercial television channel, ITV, was introduced.[73] By 1959 there were 10.5 million licence holders and 16 hours of programming a day across two channels.[74] Little of this programming catered to deaf audiences, cutting many off from cultural experiences and national events.

How people engaged with television has also been researched. Framed as a domestic technology from early on, sets were initially expensive, and many watched broadcasts through television viewing parties, where neighbours, friends, and family would gather at an individual who owned a set's house.[75] The timing of television schedules also shaped who was watching. In the early 1950s, there was just an hour of morning broadcasts, an hour at 3 pm and then programming at 8.30 pm, ending with the 10 pm news.[76] This schedule primarily suited the lifestyle of middle-class families, with programming for children in the afternoons and white-collar workers in the evenings.[77] Some work has been done that investigates the engagement of various groups with television; however this has primarily focused on content, for example, regarding race and gender on screen.[78]

---

[70] Silvey, p. 153.
[71] Henrik Örnebring, 'Writing the history of television audiences: The Coronation in the Mass-Observation Archive', in *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*, ed. by Helen Wheatley (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp.173-180 (p. 180).
[72] Ibid., p. 176.
[73] Creeber, p. 32.
[74] Ibid., p. 34.
[75] John Corner, *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: BFI Publishing, 1991), p. 3. Örnebring, p. 180.
[76] Creeber, p. 31.
[77] David Oswell, *Television, childhood, and the home: a history of the making of the child television audience in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).
[78] Sushelia Nasta and Mark Stein, eds., *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
Vicky Ball, 'The "Feminization" of British Television and the Re-Traditionalization of Gender', *Feminist Media Studies* 12 (2012) 248-264 (pp. 248-264).
Janet Thumim, ed., *Small Screens, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s* (London: IB Tauris, 2002).

It is clear from reviewing the existing literature that the cultural forums of radio, cinema, and television are of great historical interest and that the engagement of British publics with them between 1925 and 1960 shaped their uptake, development, and legacy. However, the experiences of deaf and hard of hearing people are largely missing from historians' accounts of these processes.

1.1ii. Disability History and D/deaf Identities

In the past 50 years disability history has been established and developed as a field of study. As disability rights movements of the 1970s and 1980s became of political and public interest, scholars began to utilise disability as a powerful category of historical analysis.[79] Having previously neglected disability as a topic, historians began to study it as a way of challenging stereotypes of disabled people. Early disability historians rejected viewing disability through a medical lens, as they felt that this had negatively effected disabled people by viewing them in stark, clinical terms.[80] At the dawn of the twenty-first century, however, work on embodied histories of disability began to blur the lines between social, cultural, and medical approaches.[81] The industrial thesis of disability, which explores disability around work and economics, developed in the 1980s and continues today, although research such as this thesis does seek to challenge it.[82]

Daniel Blackie and Alexia Moncrieff write that three characteristics dominate disability history: a political desire to promote the rights of disabled people, utilising a socio-cultural approach to disability and arguing for the legitimacy of disability as an important category of analysis for historians, all of which are represented in this thesis.[83] Along with these characteristics, in the past few decades historians of disability have hugely expanded the remit of their work. The field has become increasingly interdisciplinary and taken many methodological approaches including exploring the topic in relation to gender, sexuality and

---

[79] Daniel Blackie and Alexia Moncrieff, 'State of the Field: Disability History', *The Journal of the Historical Association* 107(2022), 790.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Michael A Rembis, Catherine Jean Kudlick, Kim E Neilson, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 178-262.
David Tuner and Daniel Blackie, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution: Physical Impairment in British Coalmining, 1780–1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press (2018).
[83] Blackie and Moncrieff, p. 793.

colonialism.[84] The geographic boundaries of disability history have also expanded, with recent works covering African nations, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe among others.[85] Historians of disability have also focused on different types of disability, including intellectual disabilities, blindness, and D/deafness.[86] D/deaf history has been researched both within disability history and as a separate field of study.

To understand how radio, cinema, and television have been discussed within D/deaf histories, it is important to understand the different D/deaf identities and cultures. In the nineteenth century, deaf communities formed and flourished in Britain, as documented in Esme Cleall's work on disability and The British Empire.[87] She writes on how deaf people were othered throughout the British Empire and how this led to deaf people congregating together in entirely deaf spaces, meeting through in deaf churches, schools, and institutions.[88] Neil Pemberton has written about the importance of recognising the growing agency of members of the British deaf community during the Victorian era in his work on deafness and religion. As consciousness grew of the deaf community as a unique section of society with its own language and customs.[89] Before the twentieth century, however, the British deaf community was made up of a heterogeneous group of people whose hearing ranged from what today is considered hard of hearing or hearing loss to profound deafness, all under the banner of 'deafness'.[90] During the early twentieth century, and particularly the interwar years in Britain, there were many attempts to measure hearing and categorise deafness. Phyliss M. Tookey Kerridge (1901-1940) was, among other scientific specialities, an expert in hearing loss, the measurement of hearing and hearing aids.[91] During the interwar

---

[84] Susan Burch and Lindsey Patterson, 'Not Just Any Body: Disability, Gender, and History', *Journal of Women's History* 25(2013), 122–137.
Jason S Farr, 'Libertine Sexuality and Queer-Crip Embodiment in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 16(2016), 96–118.
Esme Cleall, *Colonising Disability: Otherness and Impairment Across Britain and its Empire, c. 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
[85] Esme Cleall, ed, *Global Histories of Disability, 1700-2015* (New York: Routledge, 2022).
[86] C.F. Goodey, *A History of Intelligence and "Intellectual Disability": The Shaping of Psychology in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2011).
Anderson
[87] Esme Cleall, *Colonising Disability: otherness and impairment across Britain and its empire, c. 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022),.
[88] Ibid., pp. 148-179.
[89] Neil Pemberton, 'Deafness and Holiness: Home Missions, Deaf Congregations, and Natural Language 1860-1890', *Victorian Review*, 35 (2009), 65-82 (pp. 65-82).
[90] Gooday and Sayer, (2017).
[91] Coreen McGuire and Jaipreet Virdi have also used the Medical Sub-Committee Reports in their article on Phyllis M. Tookey Kerridge: Jaipreet Virdi and Coreen McGuire, 'Phyllis M. Tookey Kerridge and the science of audiometric standardization in Britain', *The British Journal for the History of Science* 51(2018), 138-.

period she studied ways to standardise levels of hearing and hearing loss. For example, using measurements from audiometers.[92] Through her work, and the work of other specialists, deafness and hearing became more quantifiable, and hearing aids blurred the lines between who was considered deaf and who was hearing. This caused shifts and changes in the British deaf community around who could access certain sounds and who could benefit from technology such as hearing aids. These changes would also be evident in their use or rejection of the cultural forums covered in this thesis.

A driving force in the formation of D/deaf identities was the use of oralism educational methods, also known as oralism, in British schools for deaf children. From the 1760s, schools for deaf children were established across the country. As well as sign language, teachers would attempt to teach deaf children to speak. Methods that encouraged speaking were known as oralist methods.[93] Oralism is the umbrella term used to describe the belief that deaf people should aspire to use speech and lip reading, rather than sign language or other forms of communication.[94] Sign language – communicating through gestures – was recorded in Britain as early as the sixteenth century, noted on marriage certificates and by diarist Samuel Pepys.[95] Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, various publications illustrated and standardised signs in Britain, signs which were used within the British deaf community.[96] In the early nineteenth century teachers and students at schools for deaf children used sign language as their dominant form of communication and teaching.[97]

In the 1860s, however, the success in some schools in teaching deaf children to speak drove an increased preference for oralist methods.[98] In the 1870s the Association of the Oral Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb and the Society for Training Teachers of the Deaf were formed.[99] Within these organisations, lip reading – the process of understanding words and phrases from the shape of the speakers mouth – was encouraged, with a strong emphasis on training teachers of deaf children how to pass on the skill.[100] Members of the societies argued for the prioritisation of speech in deaf education. At the 1880 Congress on the Education of

[92] Ibid., p. 125-6.
[93] Lee Fullwood and Martin Levinson, 'Fifty years on and still no resolution: Deaf education, ideology, policy and the cost of resistance', *Teaching and Teacher Education* 129 (2023), 3.
[94] Ibid.
[95] UCL, 'BSL Timeline' *UCL* <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/british-sign-language-history/bsl-timeline> [accessed 20 June 2023].
[96] Ibid.
[97] Fullwood and Levinson, p. '3.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Gooday and Sayer, p. 52-3.

the Deaf in Milan, delegates made up of medical specialists and teachers of deaf children decided that a policy of oralism should be pursued.[101] Despite the continued use of sign language in many deaf schools, oralism became the standard in British deaf schools. Oralist methods were largely clinical and aimed at assimilating deaf children into wider, hearing society rather than remaining a separate, unique minority with their own language.[102]

As the twentieth century progressed, various influences highlighted and reinforced divides in the community, culminating in different identities. Whilst all identities have complexities and are, to some extent, fluid, it is helpful to draw a distinction between those who identify as 'Deaf' or 'deaf', a division that solidified in the 1970s. Paddy Ladd wrote that the lowercase deaf 'refers to those for whom deafness is primarily an audiological experience.'[103] For these people, deafness was a medical experience, and they desired to remain part of hearing society by using assistive technology and oralist methods. Assistive technology is the term used to describe 'products or systems that support and assist individuals with disabilities, restricted mobility or other impairments to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible'. [104] Meanwhile, Ladd writes that for those who identify as Deaf, 'the sign language communities and cultures of the Deaf collective represents their primary experience and allegiance, many of whom perceive their experience as essentially akin to other language minorities.'[105] Harlan Lane describes those within the Deaf community as being mainly against 'the audist establishment', which is perceived as paternalistic, and looking down on those who do not use spoken language or attempt lipreading.[106] Lane, like many scholars of Deafness, rejects the medicalisation of deafness, something that overlaps with the history of technology, as it is sometimes framed as a so-called 'fix' for deafness. Framing technological developments as 'fixes' or 'cures' for deafness neglects the diversity of D/deaf identities and culture and the connection between 'cures' for deafness and eugenic ideas of eradicating deafness.[107] Historians who combine histories of technology with D/deaf history must consider those who rejected or were harmed

---

[101] Fullwood and Levinson, p. 3.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture – In Search of Deafhood* (Clevedon, Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2003), p. xvii.
[104] Gov.UK, 'Assistive technology: definition and safe use', *Gov.UK* < https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assistive-technology-definition-and-safe-use/assistive-technology-definition-and-safe-use> [accessed 1 July 2023].
[105] Ladd, p. xvii.
[106] Harlan Lane, *The Mask of Benevolence – Disabling the Deaf Community* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1992), p. 69.
Ibid., p. 77.
[107] Fullwood and Levinson, p. 3.

by technologies – for example being further excluded or stigmatised – as well as those who embraced it. My approach in this thesis is to combine two different social constructionist approaches. The first is the social construction of disability, often called the social model of disability. Mike Oliver, a scholar of disability who helped pioneer the idea, dates the establishment of the social model of disability to the mid-1970s and the publication of the Fundamental Principles of Disability document by the activist group the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation.[108] They argued that it was not physical impairments that disabled people, but the disabling barriers that appeared throughout society.[109]

.

The social model came out of increasing disability activism in the 1970s, which included D/deaf people and contributed to separate D/deaf identities. Paddy Ladd explores how D/deaf people began to take activism into their own hands, reinforcing their identities for themselves rather than relying on paternalistic constructions of D/deafness.[110] The concept of the 'mask of benevolence', the idea that charities claiming to help deaf people were actually hindering their progress as a unique cultural group, was created by Harlan Lane, an American Deaf scholar who wrote on the 'disabling of the Deaf community'.[111] The idea of charities representing D/deaf peoples' best interests was challenged, and the social constructionist idea that D/deafness was constructed by those who had power – in this case, 'hearing' society – emerged.[112] In this thesis, I will explore how the debate around deaf and hard of hearing people's interactions with radio, cinema, and television contributed to how ideas of D/deafness were shaped by deaf and hard of hearing individuals, organisations such as the NID, and hearing society.

In 2009, Irene Leigh's work *A Lens on Deaf Identities* highlighted the complexities of D/deaf identities. She wrote of different labels D/deaf people have either used or been given and argued that they prove that there is no singular 'deaf experience' and that individuals experiences shape their perceptions of deafness and their deaf identity.[113]

---

[108] Mike Oliver, 'The Social Model of Disability: Thirty Years On', *Disability and Society*, 28 (2013), 1024-1026 (p. 1024).
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ladd, p. 7.
[111] Lane, (1992).
[112] Roddy Slorach, 'Out of the Shadows: Disability Movements', *Critical Radical Social Work*, 2 (2014), 159-174 (p. 169).
[113] Leigh, p. viii.

Leigh highlights the diversity and fluidity of D/deaf identities and how different influences shape them. Her work is on late twentieth-century and twenty-first century D/deafness; however, her ideas are pertinent to my timeframe, Britain from 1925 to 1960. She explores how the terminology used to describe deafness impacted D/deaf identity, as well as the ways in which family and school environments shaped ideas of deafness. Along with her examination of the stigma and barriers D/deaf people faced, her work illuminates how different identities formed in multiple and complex ways after the era of my thesis. I adopt Leigh's pluralist approach in exploring D/deaf identities, also departing from previous work, which has set deaf and Deaf matters in binary opposition. In her book, Leigh also writes about the influence of technologies on D/deaf identity, arguing that 'far greater attention has been devoted to medically related technology' than communication/media technology, which is a gap my thesis helps to fill.[114]

1.1iii. Theories of technology

My second approach is that of the Social Construction of Technology. In my exploration of radio, cinema and television I am taking a social constructionist approach, for as D/deafness is constructed, technology and its use – or non-use – is also developed and moulded by those who are engaging with it. Therefore, a technologically determinist approach would limit any analysis of how deafness and cultural forums were discussed by people both within and outside the deaf community and how this discussion shaped both deafness and the forums. In an anti-determinist vein I am investigating how deaf and hard of hearing people used the technologies and whether they were able to influence any comprehensive changes to them.

The Social Construction of Technology (henceforth SCOT) was developed in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1984 Pinch and Bijker defined the SCOT approach, and its focus on those using technology, as a theory which 'conceived users as a social group that played a part in the construction of a technology. Different social groups […] could construct radically different meanings of a technology.'[115] Through the lens of SCOT, technologies were

[114] Ibid., p. 164.
[115] Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch, eds., *How Users Matter – The Co-Construction of Users and Technology* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 3.

flexible, and their use and development were determined by how groups of individuals used them – essentially, there is no set 'destiny' for a technology. By focusing on individual use, technologies such as hearing aids could be perceived as both medical and communication or media technology. The original claim set out by Pinch and Bijker, that relevant groups shaped technologies, failed to reflect on who was considered relevant or even how relevance could be defined.

Sally Wyatt offers a thorough critique of the limitations of early SCOT literature, focusing on 'users' and 'non-users' of technology, specifically internet communications technologies, in the 1990s.[116] In her work, Wyatt promotes the idea that attention must be paid to non-users of technology as well as those who use it. She writes that 'analysing users is important, but by focusing on users and producers we run the risk of accepting a worldview in which adoption of a new technology is the norm.'[117] By considering non-users, she argues, SCOT scholars avoid falling into 'the traps associated with following only the powerful actors.'[118] Her ideas are highly pertinent to my research in this thesis: deaf and hard of hearing people did not make up a powerful constituency amongst users who shaped radio, cinema, and television. However, they did adapt and drove adaptations for those within their community. By focusing on non-users, I can problematise the idea of an 'ideal' technology for a specific group – in my thesis, blind or deaf and hard of hearing people. By considering those who chose not to or could not engage with the three cultural forums, multiple narratives of how cultural forums and ideas of deafness were shaped by each other emerge, offering a new, more nuanced history.

Wyatt also highlights the idea that 'non-use or lack of access is a deficiency to be remedied.'[119] A key tenet of this thesis is that rejection of the cultural forumss by some deaf and hard of hearing people in the period covered is just as important as the evidence that some did engage or desire to engage with it. Vitally, their narratives demonstrate the diversity of deaf people's experiences, the early roots of separate identities surrounding audio

---

Trevor J Pinch and Wiebe E Bijker, 'The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other', *Social Studies of Science* 14 (1984) 399-441 (p. 410).

[116] Sally Wyatt, 'Non-Users Also Matter: The Construction of Users and Non-Users of the Internet' in *How Users Matter – The Co-Construction of Users and Technology*, ed. by Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005) pp. 67-80 (p. 67).

[117] Ibid., p. 77-78.

[118] Ibid., 78.

[119] Ibid., p. 68.

phenomena, and how new technologies drew new lines of division within the British deaf community.

1.1iv. Histories of D/deafness and technology

As explored in previous sections, historians have not simultaneously studied deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with radio, cinema, and television between 1925 and 1960.

Some media scholars have briefly mentioned the topic, for example, Kate Lacey in her work on listening publics in Britain. Rather than focusing on deafness, she writes of nineteenth-century concerns about the psychological effect which noise from industrialised environments had on people.[120] Lacey briefly recalls an anecdote about a deaf child being able to access the radio for the first time using headphones, but she does not examine the significance of this in detail.[121] She focuses predominantly on hearing, non-disabled audiences.[122] Most historians who have written on this topic from a Deaf perspective date the beginning of accessibility and use at around 1970/1980 in Britain.[123] I have found evidence of use, rejection, and debate over the topic in earlier decades; however, the perspectives available do not fit neatly into deaf, Deaf or hard of hearing narratives.

Peter Jackson and Martin Atherton are historians who write about D/deaf culture from a Deaf history perspective. Peter Jackson's *Britain's Deaf Heritage* and Martin Atherton's *Deafness, Community and Culture in Britain, 1945-1995* are examples of work that neglect to mention developments in D/deaf people's engagement with the cultural forums or date them as beginning far later in the twentieth century.[124] In his 1990 book, Jackson writes a chronological history of deaf people, organisations and events from the sixteenth century to the 1980s.[125] He states the aim of his work as being 'to detail, as factually as possible, the history of the British deaf people, including the development of education for the deaf and the

---

[120] Kate Lacey, *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), pp. 84-5.
[121] Ibid, p. 87.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Jackson, (1990).
[124] Ibid.
Martin Atherton, *Deafness, Community and Culture in Britain: Leisure and Cohesion*, 1945-1955 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).
[125] Jackson.

growth of the Deaf community.'[126] For the most part he covers a decade per chapter, occasionally including subject specific chapters such as 'Royalty and the Aristocracy' or 'Scouts, Girl Guides and Cadets'.[127]

Jackson includes a chapter on 'Literature, Theatre and Television' in the 1940s, making no mention of film or radio.[128] In it, he focuses primarily on print media, such as deaf journals and deaf authors. A mere three pages are allocated to a discussion of television; within this short space, Jackson begins the history of television for the deaf in the mid-1980s with the BBC's SEE HEAR programme.[129] The reason for Jackson's reluctance to comment on previous attempts to make television accessible for D/deaf and hard of hearing viewers may be twofold. One possibility is that he was unaware of sources which mentioned the scheme and comments on radio and film – however, at the beginning of the chapter, he lists the journals in which I have found much of my evidence. Another possibility is that as a historian of Deafness, Jackson did not consider broadcasts without sign language or regular subtitles as accessible, therefore pushing the beginning of accessible television for deaf and hard of hearing people from the 1950s to the 1980s in Britain.

In his book, *Deafness, Community and Culture in Britain, 1945*-1995, Martin Atherton seeks to explore Deaf clubs and the communal life of the British D/deaf community in the mid to late twentieth century.[130] Atherton spends little time exploring the deep complexities of the British D/deaf community in this era, which will be drawn out in this thesis, instead presenting a concrete community of sign language users with little to no conflict. Using club reports of their activities from many of the same deaf journals used in this thesis, Atherton reports on what deaf people involved in the clubs were doing together in these years.[131] Like Jackson over 20 years before, Atherton makes little mention of radio, television, and film. He does, however, comment on the advent of the talkies and the loss of silent film for deaf people, as well as the advantages of slapstick comedies in the 1960s. Still, he only dates accessible cinema as beginning in the 1980s, when subtitles became more common.[132] He briefly mentions clubs using video cameras to record home videos, which would be edited

[126] Ibid., p. v.
[127] Ibid., Frontmatter.
[128] Ibid., p. 278.
[129] Ibid., pp. 292-295.
[130] Atherton, (2012).
Ibid., p. 1.
[131] Ibid., p. 77.
[132] Ibid., p. 134.

and displayed across deaf clubs to show the activities that clubs in different areas were doing.[133] He remains convinced that print media were still dominant within deaf communication in the twentieth century, something with which I agree:

> Despite the introduction of new technology which allows deaf people to communicate with each other more readily over distance, and the dissemination of information through television programmes aimed at deaf viewers, the deaf newspaper remained an important means of mass communication throughout much of the second half of the twentieth century.[134]

Atherton does not mention the numerous discussions about film and television and occasional responses to radio that are printed in the earlier pages of the journals he is examining. He ignores the contribution of these technologies to the formation of Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing communities and identities.

Within the literature on each technology, some work has been done, albeit in isolation, regarding D/deafness and radio, cinema, and television. Work has been undertaken on blindness and audio technologies. For example, Matthew Rubery's *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (published in 2016) dedicates a chapter to the use of recorded books on gramophone discs for blinded veterans of the First World War.[135] Rubery studied the production of a 'talking book library' for the residents of St Dunstan's Home for Blinded Veterans, and highlights how the social and political position of blind people improved as consensus grew that the state held responsibility for blinded veterans.[136] Rubery's work offers insight into how D/deafness and hearing loss have been side-lined in the history of technology, even when disabilities are discussed. Rubery wrote in 2016 that we live in an 'audio-visual' culture, as 'the telephone, radio, cinema, television and other modern technologies to a large extent have displaced print's privileged spot.'[137] He fails to acknowledge the barriers audio technology can create or the need for adaptation and accessibility.

Rebecca Scales has explored radio within the French context in *Radio Broadcasting, Disabled Veterans and the Politics of National Recovery in Interwar France, 1921-1939* (published 2008).[138] Within this book, Scales puts forward the idea of the 'radio nation' as

---

[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., p. 166.
[135] Rubery, (2016).
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid., p. 43.
[138] Rebecca Scales, (2012).

well as how broadcasting related to French politics with listening acting as a performance of citizenship.[139] Like Rubery, she devotes a chapter to radio and blinded veterans of the First World War; however, she also includes those who were deafened or had hearing loss. Her work again highlights the difference in how blind and deaf people were treated – within both France and Britain. Whilst blinded veterans used the radio to promote their abilities and place within society, deaf activists still had to draw upon sympathy and attempt to 'legitimise' deafness as a cause in need of attention and aid.[140] Julie Anderson, in *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: Soul of a Nation,* wrote of this disparity, arguing that blind people were the most politically active during the interwar years in Britain and received greater concessions and sympathy compared to other disabled groups.[141]

The transition from silent to talkie cinema in Britain has been written about regarding other social groups. For example, Laraine Porter discusses women during this period, whilst Robert Murphy explores the class implications of voice in talkie films.[142] However, the literature on deafness and cinema that exists within film and media studies focuses, overwhelmingly, on the films themselves and how they portray deafness rather than exploring audience response and engagement.

Two historians who have written on D/deafness and the transition to talkie cinema are John S. Schuman and Russel L. Johnson. Both of these historians were writing in the American context – little work has been done on British cinema and deafness or hearing loss within the early-mid twentieth century. John S. Schuchman has presented the silent film era as a 'golden age' for deaf people participating in mainstream culture.[143] He writes of the inclusion of deaf people in cinema audiences that 'this period represents the one brief time that deaf and hard of hearing citizens had comparatively equal access to motion pictures.'[144] He draws parallels between film and sign language, exploring silent films made by the National Association of the Deaf in the United States that demonstrated sign language.[145]

---

[139] Ibid., p. 4.
[140] Ibid., p. 90.
[141] Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 28.
[142] Laraine Porter, ''Have you a happy voice?' Women's voices and the Talkie revolution in Britain 1929-1932', *Music, Sound and the Moving Image* 12 (2018), 141-169 (pp. 141-169).
Robert Murphy, 'English as she is spoke: The first British Talkies', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 32 (2012), 537-557 (pp. 537-557).
[143]John S Schuchman, 'The Silent Film Era: Silent Films, NAD Films, and the Deaf Community's Response' *Sign Language Studies* 4 (2004), 231-238 (p. 231).
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid., p. 233.

After the advent of talkies, deaf people made silent films for deaf entertainment. This was due to the failure of campaigns led by deaf people appealing to the film industry to continue the production of silent films.[146] Schuchman then proceeds to explore the stories of deaf actors and characters in films.[147] Schuchman takes a Deaf history perspective, focusing on the visual aspects of cinema rather than on sound and assistive technology, and honing in on sign language – a key tenement of Deaf culture – as the central theme in constructing the history of deaf people and cinema.

Russel L. Johnson has argued that the simultaneous shift from silent to talkie cinema and the peak of oralism in the United States were significant. On the impact of talkie cinema, he writes that 'both changes reflected larger beliefs about normalcy, language, communication, deafness, intelligence and ultimately humanity in the early-twentieth century.'[148] His argument is based on the idea that in the late 1920s, deaf people who failed to accomplish speech and lip reading were considered failures under the oralist tradition that prioritised speech. In contrast to theatre and talkies which included speech, silent films were considered to be primitive and lowbrow entertainment.[149] He links the two cultural moments as reflective of a 'phonocentric' society that believed speech to be the primary source of communication between people and the ultimate mark of human intelligence.[150] Johnson compares the experiences of deaf people to the struggles of hearing actors transitioning from silent to talkie work.[151]

Few historians have written on the third of the cultural forums that I am researching in this thesis, television, before the late twentieth century. Many historians of D/deafness date the dawn of accessible television to the 1970s and 1980s. In her work on subtitling in Europe, Aline Remael argued that 'the BBC has always led the way' and that some subtitling existed 'as early as 1972.'[152] Margaret Deuchar, in *British Sign Language* (published in 1984), wrote of the Deaf Broadcasting Campaign in the late 1970s.[153] She recalled attempts to have subtitling and sign language on television and considered the BBC programme SEE HEAR to

[146] Ibid., p. 234.
[147] Ibid., pp. 235-238.
[148] Russell L Johnson, '"Better Gestures": A Disability History Perspective on the Transition from (Silent) Movies to Talkies in the United States', *Journal of Social History* 51 (2017), 1-26 (p. 1).
[149] Ibid., p. 2.
[150] Ibid., p. 17.
[151] Ibid., p. 12.
[152] Aline Remael, 'Sampling Subtitling for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing on Europe', in *Media for All – Subtitling for the Deaf, Audio Description and Sign Language,* ed. Jorge Díaz-Cintas, Pilar Orero and Aline Remael (New York: Rodopi, 2007) 23-52 (p. 43).
[153] Deuchar, p. 43.

be a watershed moment.[154] This aligns with other authors of Deaf history, such as Jackson and Atherton, as subtitling and sign language are vital identifiers of Deaf culture.

In the past decade, several approaches have been developed which I will build upon for my analysis. Gooday and Sayer's *Managing the Experience of Hearing Loss in Britain, 1830-1930*, offers an emotion-focused history of those with hearing loss who do not necessarily identify as deaf and sought to use assistive devices and other methods to integrate into 'hearing' society.[155] This work is helpful as it focuses on those outside the deaf community who nonetheless are affected by developments in audio technology, for example, the introduction of new soundscapes through radio, cinema, and television. The authors acknowledge the complexities of hearing loss and offer a unique take on D/deaf history, including previously marginalised people who may not have identified as deaf but also do not have 'normative' levels of hearing.

The work of Jaipreet Virdi in her book *Hearing Happiness – Deafness Cures in History*, published in 2020, is also informative.[156] Whilst ostensibly a medical and technological history of ways in which people have tried to cure deafness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, mainly in the United States, Virdi's book delves deeper, including the author's own experiences of becoming profoundly to severely deaf due to meningitis as a young child in the 1980s. Virdi encapsulates her understanding of deafness and communication and how difficult it can be to socially classify deafness, stating that some considered her too 'hearing' to be 'deaf' due to her use of speech and hearing aids. She writes, 'what I do know for sure – what I can see clearly as a historian – is that deafness is usually a negotiation about normalcy, rooted somewhere between hearing and speech.'[157] This balance, and ideas of 'normalcy' and communication, are themes that appear throughout this thesis. Gooday, Sayer, and Virdi's research broadens who is considered in histories of hearing loss and D/deafness. They also consider the individual experience and emotional consequences for people with hearing loss and deafness in an audio-dominated society.

Coreen McGuire is another scholar whose approach I am building upon to a large extent. Her 2016 thesis, *The 'Deaf Subscriber' and the shaping of the British Post Office's amplified*

[154] Ibid.
[155] Gooday and Sayer, (2017).
[156] Jaipreet Virdi, *Hearing Happiness: Deafness Cures in History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020).
[157] Ibid.

telephones 1911-1939, covers audio technology and the British deaf community.[158] A 2017 edited volume includes a chapter by McGuire that includes key elements of her thesis, titled *Inventing Amplified Telephony: The Co-Creation of Aural Technology and Disability*.[159] McGuire's early work focused on the telephone and how the UK Post Office and so-called deaf subscribers developed an accessible amplified telephone. McGuire writes of the exclusion that deaf people faced with the introduction of the telephone, stating that 'the telephone was originally designed for people with unproblematic hearing to communicate with each other […] it was thus a purely aural device – like radio – that served to further isolate hard of hearing people from key areas of everyday life.'[160] In the 1920s and 1930s, the UK Post Office introduced an amplified telephone – having been contacted by hard of hearing people whose help they later failed to acknowledge.[161] By introducing a device that could help those with certain levels of hearing loss, McGuire reveals how the Post Office 'redefined the thresholds of 'deafness'', as the use or the non-use of the telephone became a marker of deafness to those both within and outside of the deaf community, thus challenging deaf identities.[162] McGuire highlights the innovation of individual hard of hearing users, as also explored in Gooday and Sayer, shining a light on those who desired to interact with the audio environment and did not necessarily identify as deaf. McGuire concludes that 'the relationship between hearing loss, technology and who controls these two things are more nuanced than existing studies have recognised.'[163]

1.1v. My approach

I have approached the topic of how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with cultural forums using the two social constructionist theories mentioned previously: the social construction of technology and the social model of disability and D/deafness. Combining these two approaches, I will examine how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with the cultural forums between 1925 and 1960, how this engagement was mediated, and how that mediation changed over this timeframe. Inspired by the work of Coreen McGuire my

[158] Coreen McGuire, 'The 'Deaf Subscriber' and the shaping of the British Post Office's amplified telephones 1911-1939' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, School of Philosophy, Religion and the History of Science, 2016).
[159] McGuire, 'Inventing Amplified Telephony', (2017).
[160] Ibid., p. 70.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid., 71.
[163] Ibid., 86.

approach is also to simultaneously explore constructions of disability and technology and examine how each moulded the other but across multiple types of deafness and hearing loss. I will investigate how radio, cinema, and television each contained aspects that sparked debate in deaf and hard of hearing communities, thus revealing the complex and fluid nature of deaf people's interactions with technology in the era. Conversely, I shall explore how the ways in which the deaf community discussed and promoted their engagement, or lack of engagement, with the cultural forums also shaped ideas of the use and status of the forums within the deaf community and beyond.

There are many aspects of McGuire's approach which I have utilised in this thesis. Her work establishes the co-construction of both deafness or hearing loss and technology and how new audio technologies create new parameters for deafness and hearing. Whilst our conclusions are similar, I am exploring multiple types of deafness and hearing loss, not just one, as McGuire has done. I do this to explore further the fragmenting of the deaf community and these new barriers. Also, rather than exploring an organisation outside of the deaf community, such as the UK Post Office, I am exploring organisations within it, namely the NID and deaf journals. I am also researching multiple technologies. I do this to establish the connections between the nature of deaf people's engagement with radio, cinema, and television and the institutions within the deaf community. This approach reveals the complex relationship between technologies' audio and visual elements and what is required for accessibility. In using McGuire's process of exploring the co-construction of both technology and thresholds of deafness, I also seek to demonstrate how deaf people's interactions with three different technologies over several decades also shape each other.

Additionally, I attempt to place my work within more extensive histories of disability. Rather than focusing on an industrial thesis of disability, which analyses disability through the lens of work and economic concerns, I am focusing on matters of entertainment, culture and leisure. I also explore the comparisons drawn during the twentieth century between blindness and deafness, and on how this impacted how the deaf community approached new cultural forums. This approach also allows for a multi-sensory approach, examining both the visual and audio elements of radio, cinema, and television.

In taking this far-reaching approach that includes multiple cultural forums, disabilities, and types of deafness, I will expose previously neglected debates and engagement with new cultural forums and how this shaped the deaf community in Britain. In doing this, I also hope

to open new avenues of exploration within D/deaf and disability histories that explore the vast diversity and complexity of D/deaf and hard of hearing people's experiences with technology.

1.2.Terminology

In D/deaf and disability histories, the terminology used is sensitive and highly charged, as vocabulary becomes outdated, problematic, and offensive. The shifting language used within these histories also makes it imperative to clarify what is being discussed and in which contexts. The front matter of this thesis includes a glossary of vocabulary that will be used throughout it; however, here, I will elaborate on the terminology I am using and the reasoning behind it.

As previously mentioned, deaf, Deaf and D/deaf all have different meanings attributed to them. Within this thesis, where I use the term 'deaf', I am referring to the large, fluid community of deaf people that, whilst diverse, was less fractured at the beginning of the twentieth century. When I use Deaf, I refer to those who identify with Deaf culture and language. In writing about identities that became increasingly apparent and formalised after the era of this thesis (post-1960), I use D/deaf as an umbrella term for the multitude of identities held by those who do not consider themselves fully hearing. This has become a standard term in literature on D/deafness to encompass multiple D/deaf identities.[164] Throughout the thesis I use the term 'deaf' as this signifies the community during the era. Capitalised Deaf did not come into use until later in the twentieth century. Therefore, where I use Deaf I am referring to events post-1970.

As well as deaf people, I also discuss those who are hard of hearing and hearing within this thesis. I am not taking a medicalised or technological approach to the topic of deafness or hearing within this research; therefore, these terms do not refer to a numerical degree of deafness or hearing but rather how individuals identify. For example, two people could have had a similar level of hearing impairment, but one of them could identify as hard of hearing, the other as Deaf. . Relating to this, where I use the term 'hearing' – usually in reference to

[164] Tracy Skelton and Gill Valentine, '"It feels normal like being Deaf is normal": An exploration into the complexities of defining D/deafness and young D/deaf people's identities' *Canadian Geographer* 47 (2003), pp. 455-56.

‘hearing audiences’ – I am mentioning those who do not consider themselves deaf or hard of hearing rather than those above a specific audiological, sound measurement. I use the phrase ‘deaf and hard of hearing’ to encompass those who identified as deaf as well as those outside of the deaf community who had difficulty hearing.

I also write about ‘mainstream’ audiences. By this, I mean those who do not identify as deaf or hard of hearing. There are, of course, multiple and intersecting identities within hearing audiences; I am using it as an umbrella term to describe those perceived by producers of the cultural forums and content makers for the forums to be the widest section of their audience – something liable to evolve and change within different contexts.

1.3.Sources and Methodology

I have used sources from within and outside the deaf community between 1925 and 1960. My starting point was to look at institutional records, beginning with the National Institute for the Deaf (NID). During my period of study, members of the National Institute for the Deaf portrayed themselves as the leading organisation for deaf interests and matters, serving as both a service for deaf people and a conduit to the outside world. Their annual reports and, from the 1940s, their in-house journal, *The Silent World*, demonstrate what attitudes could be found towards the three cultural forums I am studying.

I have systematically gone through the annual reports produced by the NID within the specified timeframe, gathering evidence on what issues were pertinent to the organisation across different years. There are other documents available, such as minute books, accounts, photographs, wage ledgers and personal documents belonging to prominent members of the NID, now available at the UCL Special Collection archive. During the period in which I was carrying out my research, these were not available to me, due to Covid-19 restrictions and documents being moved and uncatalogued. The annual reports of the institution, being more concise and covering what were considered the major developments of the year, allowed me to take a broader overview of the organisation's relationship to the cultural forums over multiple decades. Within the annual reports, I focused on where they mentioned or sometimes neglected to mention radio, cinema, and television. The NID was comprised of many committees and sub-committees, including a medical committee. I have not consulted the medical committee reports or minutes, in which technologies such as hearing aids are discussed, as I want to prioritise deaf and hard of hearing people’s engagement with the cultural forums beyond a technocratic or medical lens, focusing instead on their response to

the forums in their everyday lives. Whilst the medical committee reports, as discussed by McGuire and Virdi, detail NID members' attempts to measure and categorise hearing numerically, I am investigating how ideas of deafness were shaped by non-medical, media technologies.[165]

I also examined some of the annual reports for the British Deaf Association (BDA). Unfortunately, there was a limited number of BDA reports available at the Action of Hearing Loss Library, with the majority of these covering the period 1930-1940. Due to the archive moving and Covid-19 restrictions, I was unable to consult BDA reports over the full length and breadth of my thesis. Action on Hearing Loss, being one modern iteration of the NID, had a complete set of NID Annual Reports, as did the British Library.[166] As well as practical barriers to accessing further BDA reports, from the limited sample I examined it is apparent that the BDA did not comment frequently on the cultural forums beyond silent film. Were all of the BDA reports from the period consulted, it is likely that the most significant finding would be their lack of reporting in comparison to the NID on matters of radio, television and film. The NID and BDA would later be considered opposed, with the NID catering more to those who identified as deaf and the BDA to those embedded in Deaf culture. The organisations' annual reports, particularly those of the NID, revealed what technologies were being debated and what the 'official' opinion was from those claiming to represent the deaf community.

Sadly now closed, the Action on Hearing Loss Library held some unique items that offered another perspective on the NID's relationship to radio, cinema and television. I systematically went through a collection of scrapbooks of newspaper clippings held at the library. It is unknown who compiled these scrapbooks, other than that they were associated with the NID. However, as well as offering information on events surrounding the technologies and deafness, they give insight into which articles the NID considered important enough to preserve.

---

[165] Virdi, Jaipreet and McGuire, Coreen., 'Phyllis M. Tookey Kerridge and the science of audiometric standardization in Britain', *The British Journal for the History of Science* 51(2018), 138-155.

[166] The NID became the Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) in 1961, outside the timeframe of this thesis. In 2011 it was renamed Action on Hearing Loss – hence the Action on Hearing Loss Library. In November 2020, the charity reverted to its former name, RNID. In this thesis, I refer to research I undertook in the Action on Hearing Loss Library in 2018-19. This library has now closed, and researchers looking for resources should look in the UCL Special Collections under the name of RNID. For details, please refer to the Bibliography and the chapter footnotes which refer to these materials.

Prominent deaf journals of the era (which were surveyed on pp. 9-10 above) are another source that I have used to a great extent. Whilst connected to institutions such as the NID and BDA both through individuals and through the content they are reporting on, these journals offer insights into wider deaf communities and deaf subscribers. For example, news items, editors' columns, and letters pages provide perspectives on what topics were considered essential or were being discussed. The variety of opinions found within different journals also demonstrates the contested nature of topics within the deaf community, in my case regarding radio, cinema, and television.

The most popular deaf journals of the era existed at different and overlapping times, with some going out of circulation or being conglomerated. **Appendix 1** details the timeline of the circulation of deaf journals and mergers that took place in the twentieth century. In the journals I have looked at the diversity of opinion regarding the three cultural forums is of interest. The size and frequency of the content on each cultural forum varied between *The Deaf Quarterly News* and *Deaf News*, *The British Deaf Times* and *The Silent World*.

The final sources that I have used to explore deafness and the three cultural forums is a systematic search of the online archives of *The Times* Digital Archive and the ProQuest online collection of British periodicals. These yield perspectives from outside of the deaf community. They were explored using a suite of search terms. Most searches paired either 'Deaf' or 'Hard of Hearing' with one of 'Wireless', Radio', Cinema' and 'Film'; in addition, I searched for the pair 'Blind' and 'Wireless' and for the single phrase 'Hospital Radio'. The two archives also offer a range of publications across different political positions and interests – for example, *The Times* was politically right leaning. In contrast, *The Manchester Guardian*, which came up frequently in my search of the ProQuest collection, was left leaning. **Appendix 2** contains figures on the number of results each search yielded. The investigations reveal how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with the technologies and how various outlets reported on deaf organisations' activities. I was then able to compare how events were being reported both within and outside of the deaf community and, to some extent, how deafness was constructed and thought about by mainstream media. Notably for the timeframe in which I was completing this research, these resources were available throughout various restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

These newspapers reveal references to deafness and each cultural forum, demonstrating that whilst varying across publications and in frequency, discussion of both topics in relation

to each other did take place outside of the deaf community in the years 1925-1960. Most of the keyword searches conducted brought up adverts for hearing aids or journalists using deafness as a metaphor, for example, a group being 'deaf to the concerns of another'. There were, however, articles detailing deaf people's engagement with the cultural forums. Certain publications took more interest in events in the deaf community than others; for example, *The Times* took some interest, and *The Manchester Guardian* reported on deaf matters consistently throughout the period.

In using a range of sources from across different areas of the British deaf and hard of hearing community in the years 1925-1960, as well as the mainstream press, I have been able to highlight not only the discussion of and engagement with cultural forums that was taking place but also the diversity and nuance involved in these developments.

1.4. Chapter Structure

In each chapter of this thesis, I will investigate how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with new cultural forums, how this engagement was mediated, and the process of co-construction between ideas of deafness and the forums. Chapter Two focuses on the success of the Wireless for the Blind Fund in the 1920s. The fund, which aimed to provide free wireless sets and licences to blind people in Britain, was a success, with access being confirmed in parliamentary bills. Prominent figures promoted the venture and united civilian and veteran organisations in a common cause. In exploring this campaign, I reveal how interested actors could help to cement the connection between a specified group – in this case, blind people – and technology. The campaign emphasised themes and patterns emulated in later campaigns within the deaf community. The fund's success, especially in comparison to later initiatives by organisations for deaf people, exposed the differences in how deafness and hearing loss were considered.

My findings reveal that engaging with cultural forums could benefit the members of specific communities. However, this engagement had to appear universal and straightforward for access to be provided. In this chapter, I also explore how prominent members of the blind community were able to mediate and promote an individual's engagement with radio, which was done less successfully by the deaf community regarding cinema and television. The positive publicity gained by those promoting the Wireless for the Blind scheme also explains

why deaf organisations sought to connect deafness and a cultural forum, as they tried to gain sympathy and financial support for their cause. The fund is an example of how a cultural forum and group could be co-constructed around each other, revealing that this phenomenon extended beyond the deaf community and is relevant to more comprehensive histories of disability and technology.

Chapter Three will elaborate on the situation of deaf people, particularly regarding matters of sound, compared to that of blind people. Between 1925 and 1945, new audio technology, wartime conditions, and developments in hearing aids meant that deaf and hard of hearing people had to navigate new soundscapes and expectations. The NID was primarily focused on hearing aids, employment, and safety, meaning that in comparison to blind people, there was less debate around the cultural forums. Their dismissal of wireless and refusal to prioritise it demonstrates how the NID set agendas within the deaf community and how these were sometimes contested, as evidenced in deaf journals of the era. The diversity of deaf people's experience of audio technology will be a theme throughout the thesis, especially regarding cinema and television. This chapter will reveal that how and if deaf people engaged with radio – including both speech and music broadcasts – was an intensely contested subject. Whether someone could use or not use the radio became a new threshold of measuring deafness and drew a new dividing line through the deaf community. For some, radio opened new options for entertainment and information, whereas for others it became yet another area of exclusion. At this point in the twentieth century, however, deaf organisations and publications were united in dismissing this engagement and focusing on other matters. Organisations such as the NID publicised the idea that deaf people could not use the radio and how they were excluded from yet another sphere. Simultaneously, they framed radio as a cultural forum outside of the deaf community, only serving as a new barrier to deaf people's welfare.

'Talkie' cinema was introduced in Britain and swiftly popularised. Within Deaf histories, silent cinema has been canonised as a 'Golden Era' of entertainment for deaf people. However, this negates the diversity of experiences within the deaf community and the realities of cinema. In Chapter Four, I offer a more nuanced approach, exploring how sound was always an element of cinema and how the choice by deaf individuals of whether to engage with Talkies created separation within deaf audiences. The chapter concludes by examining how those who could not, or did not want to, engage with Talkies found alternative means to continue watching silent films. The BDA set out to create a Silent

Cinema Scheme through which deaf people could still access silent films. In doing this, they constructed deaf people as a separate, neglected cinema audience and talkie films as beyond the scope of the deaf community. This separated the deaf community in terms of their degree of hearing and attitude to sound, as well as their physical location. It is difficult to quantify the levels of engagement that deaf and hard of hearing people had with silent films; however, following the introduction of talkies for at least some members of the deaf community, it was valued and missed. I explore how deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with silent film was mediated not just by officials within organisations and publications at the time but also retrospectively by historians of Deafness.

Chapter Five explores cinema from the perspective of those who could and desired to use assistive technology in the 1950s. This chapter starts with an investigation of shifts within the NID, as it became more preoccupied with those who wished to interact with their audio environments than those who could or would not. This is reflected in the NID's consistent and positive cinema coverage and attempts to work with cinema companies to provide quality assistive aids. Deaf and hard of hearing people were asked to contribute to the development of assistive technology through focus groups, highlighting that whilst some sections of the deaf and hard of hearing community were valued as an audience, others were neglected. These developments again highlight that the way technology was presented to the deaf community caused divisions. In this chapter, I uncover that there were members of the British deaf community who wanted to engage with talkies, despite the narratives set out in the previous chapter. As part of their shift to include hard of hearing people and those who used assistive hearing devices, the NID promoted individuals' engagement with cinema and portrayed it positively. Officials within the NID framed deaf people as valued audience members and cinema as accessible to members of the deaf community. The discourse around how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with cinema between 1930 and1960 highlights the diversity of experiences within the deaf community and the fractures that were becoming increasingly obvious.

The themes of this thesis culminate in Chapter Six in an exploration of how the NID and BBC attempted to provide accessible television – both in terms of hardware and broadcasts – to deaf people in the mid-1950s. It was an attempt by the NID to create a connection between deafness and technology in the mind of the British hearing public, inspired by the success of Wireless for the Blind. The sound element of television, however, was exclusionary to some in the deaf community, something which the NID rarely acknowledged. Their chosen

methods of creating accessible broadcasts also leaned towards oralist methods, such as lipreading rather than sign language. This chapter exemplifies how the NID's attempts to shape deaf people's engagement with technology were about more significant issues of defining deafness as an 'issue' in need of attention.

Meanwhile, the use of technologies by deaf and hard of hearing people remained contested, and use, non-use or methods of accessibility created new thresholds for hearing and deafness, as well as divisions that would lead to fractured identities within the community. It was no longer possible for an organisation such as the NID to convince the hearing public or deaf people that they could engage with cultural forums universally. Their attempts to construct deaf people as excluded and desirous of television access and television as an ideal medium for deaf people failed.

1.5. Conclusion

Overall, this thesis will explore how radio, cinema, and television, as cultural forums, intersected with the lives of deaf and hard of hearing people in Britain from 1925-1960. Much of how the technologies were considered in the deaf community was shaped by organisations such as the NID. However, further investigation demonstrates that the use and non-use of these technologies by deaf and hard of hearing people was highly contested and that it evolved during the era. Both ideas of deafness and the cultural forums were co-constructed around each other in increasingly diverse ways. It became impossible for spokespeople within the deaf community to promote singular ideas of deafness or engagement. In investigating multiple technologies and multiple types of deafness, and through the examination of a diverse range of sources, I uncover the complexities found when exploring sound, technology, deafness, and identity.

Chapter 2: Connecting disability and technology: The Wireless for the Blind Fund, 1920-1930

> There are times when the atmosphere of the House of Commons changes from the commonplace to the impressive with dramatic abruptness, and on the most unexpected pretexts. In a flash, after the rumble of welcome had died down, the House of Commons became attentive, sympathetic, and keenly interested.[167]

The Member of the House of Commons who had triggered this rapt reception was Captain Ian Fraser on the 10th November 1926. An aristocrat, Member of Parliament and blinded Second World War veteran, Fraser was introducing his motion, the Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill. The bill, which was passed, provided free wireless licences to blind people.[168] It was part of a broader campaign to ensure that blind people in Britain had easy access to radio and BBC broadcasts as the cultural forum became increasingly popular. This campaign would culminate in 1929 with the 'Wireless for the Blind Fund', which was successful during the era and continues today.

Whilst the primary focus of this thesis is to explore how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with emerging cultural forums in Britain, the history of blind people's engagement with radio is pertinent in both contextualising the opinions and initiatives surrounding deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with the forums, and in answering the questions that I set out in Chapter One. How blind people engaged with radio, how this engagement was mediated and how this co-constructed ideas around both radio and blindness demonstrate how a cultural forum could be connected to a specific group in the public imagination and why organisations within that group may strive to construct those connections. It also provides a comparison that reveals the position deaf people found themselves in during the early-mid twentieth century, as deafness was often misunderstood or dismissed as a priority when considered alongside other disabilities, such as blindness.

When exploring archives and newspaper reports for material on deafness and radio, cinema, and television, I repeatedly found references to the Wireless for the Blind Fund. These references were usually from members of the NID, touting the disparity between how blind people were provided with access to technology and how deaf and hard of hearing people were. For example, the Television for the Deaf Fund from the 1950s was given less

---

[167] London, Blind Veterans UK Archive Collections (BVUK), 'The Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill – The First Reading' *The St Dunstan's Review* 114.XI (1926), p. 21.
[168] Hansard, Commons Sitting, HC Deb 10 November 1926 vol 199 cc1086-8, 'Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities, Hansard, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1926/nov/10/wireless-telegraphy-blind-persons> [accessed 6 October 2021].

attention and sympathy from the public. The end of the silent film era was also presented as the equivalent of robbing blind people of radio. The relevance of the Wireless for the Blind Fund to my research, therefore, became increasingly apparent. A key difference in the success of the Wireless for the Blind Fund and initiatives connecting deaf people and cultural forums was how the different groups engaged. As will be explored below, members of the blind community were able to give the impression of universal engagement with radio and promoted its suitability for that group. In contrast, officials within the deaf community, for example, members of prominent organisations and editors of journals, struggled to present deaf people as engaging in a singular manner, as the diversity of the British deaf community became increasingly apparent as the century progressed.

The campaign to provide blind people with access to radio and broadcasts in the 1920s highlighted how interested actors could shape a cultural forum – in this case, members of St Dunstan's Home for Blinded Veterans and the Royal National Institute for the Blind (henceforth RNIB) – as being ideally suited to blind people. In this chapter, I will explore how the campaign was carefully mediated to solidify this connection and raise awareness of broader issues facing blind people. Later campaigns within the deaf community would try to replicate this. However, they would not be nearly as successful in providing access to specific cultural forums or cultivating publicity for their cause. This again highlights the differences in how deaf people were considered as opposed to blind people and how those running initiatives to provide specific groups with access to cultural forums often had wider ulterior motives.

The Wireless for the Blind Fund is an example of how the discourse surrounding blind people's access to the radio co-constructed ideas of the forum and blindness itself. Those initiating and promoting the fund were very specific in how they thought blind people should engage with the radio. They constructed it as a source of education and a mode of civic participation, as well as compensation for areas of life many blind people were excluded from – for example, printed books and newspapers. Hence, the forum was constructed as a method of serious self-improvement and engagement with national events, not just entertainment. This simultaneously constructed blind people as intelligent and eager to improve academically and as civilians, but also as people facing significant obstacles and worthy of sympathy.

The co-construction of blindness and radio reflects how a cultural forum could be connected to specific groups in the public imagination and how discourse around this connection could shape each in turn. However, it also serves as an example of co-construction as a relatively straightforward process, something that was not evident in how ideas of deafness and radio, television, and film were shaped around each other. The encroachment of these three cultural forums in the lives of deaf and hard of hearing people resulted in multiple complex constructions of both deafness and the purpose of the forums for deaf and hard of hearing people. This will be explored in later chapters of the thesis, as the events in this chapter informed why some encouraged this co-construction and highlighted the differences between the blind community and the deaf community during this era.

To explain these differences, I will first explore the historical position of blind people in Britain. By the 1920s, organisations for blind people had become more politically powerful compared to other groups of disabled people. Additionally, the number of veterans blinded in the First World War bought about a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the blind from the state. This positioning and consideration of blindness contributed to the success of associating blindness with radio and their perceived need for access to it. I will also demonstrate how the connection between blindness and radio evolved thanks to the Wireless in Hospitals Fund, 1919-1925. This London-based initiative affirmed that blind people should engage with radio and demonstrated public and political support for the notion. I will then detail the formation of the Wireless for the Blind Fund and how prominent figures within the British blind community mediated it. The coalition of St Dunstan's and the RNIB, representing veteran and largely civilian interests respectively, contributed to the fund's success and shaped both ideas around the radio and how blind people were regarded in Britain. Finally, I will consider the reaction to the fund, its success, and its legacy.

2.1. The historical position of the blind community in Britain

Despite earlier divisions over tactile alphabets, along the lines of class and gender, by the 1920s, the blind community in Britain was relatively unified.[169] As a collective, they held

[169] For insights on earlier divisions in the blind community see:
John Oliphant, *The Early Education of the Blind in Britain c.1790–1900: Institutional Experience in England and Scotland* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).
John Oliphant, 'Touching the Light: The Invention of Literacy for the Blind', *Paedagogica Historica*, 44(2008), 67-82.

significant social and political power when compared with other groups of disabled people. This aided the success of the Wireless for the Blind Fund, as those drawing connections between radio and blind people harnessed this advantage to encourage engagement, improve access and promote the welfare of blind people. Here I will use secondary literature to demonstrate how the position of blind people in Britain evolved and why, unlike within the deaf community, members of the blind community successfully mediated how and why blind people engaged with radio.

In Britain, the blind community was bought together by various charitable initiatives that became increasingly centralised. In his study of voluntary charities for blind people, Gordon Phillips tracks how establishments for the education and training of blind people were set up across Europe between 1780 and 1820.[170] The most significant concern was poverty and blind people's 'potential economic usefulness.'[171] In the 1850s, workshops in which blind people could earn a fixed weekly salary, for example, making mats or brushes, were created in Britain.[172] Additionally, in 1868 what would become the Royal National Institute for the Blind was formed by the partially sighted Thomas Rhodes Armitage. Initially created to improve the availability and quality of Braille literature, the socially advantageous position of the aristocratic Armitage and others involved in the organisation meant that it became a crucial player in the welfare of blind people.[173]

Thirty years before the First World War, the previously fractured and decentralised charities drew together. Shortly before the war, they 'turned their attention to, and pinned their hopes upon, the intervention of the state.'[174] Post-war, the large numbers of blinded veterans, perceived as greater compassion and support than blind civilians during the era, spurred the state into action, passing the Blind Person's Act in 1920. Phillips labels the 1920s as 'a point of historical transition, where the state assumed from charity the primary responsibility of welfare of the blind.'[175] The formation of St Dunstan's Home for Blinded

---

Heather Tilley, 'Frances Browne, "The Blind Poetess": Towards a Poetics of Blind Writing', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 3(2009), 147-161.

[170] Gordon Phillips, *The Blind in British Society: Charity, State and Community c1780-1930* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2004), p. 18.

[171] Ibid., p. 39.

[172] Ibid., p. 117-119.

[173] RNIB, 'Who We Are', *RNIB – See Differently* <https://www.rnib.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/> [accessed 4 December 2022].

Phillips, p. 137.

[174] Ibid., p. 267.

[175] Ibid., p. 406.

Veterans by Sir Arthur Pearson, a blind man himself, in 1915 also contributed to the perception of blinded veterans as both deserving of help but also respected, capable people.[176]

The relative unity and organisation of the blind community meant they could influence government and public action. Julie Anderson agrees that in the twentieth century, blind people 'were the most politically active disabled group' that received more significant concessions.[177] She added that 'blindness was an acceptable and recognisable disability and many were highly sympathetic to those without sight.'[178] Graeme Gooday and Karen Sayer highlight the discrimination faced by those who were deaf and hard of hearing, whilst also exposing the 'common trope in Victorian culture that blindness was a greater tragedy than deafness.'[179] The sympathy and respect that blind people gained were far more significant than other disabled groups and paved the way for successful campaigns such as the Wireless for the Blind Fund. The fund was not even the first initiative to provide blind people, particularly blind veterans, with audio entertainment. Charities supporting blind people in the interwar years had made previous attempts to provide entertainment through auditory technology in the interwar years. For example, Matthew Rubery has written on the 'Talking Book Library', an effort to record novels on gramophone discs for blinded veterans.[180] This, however, had limited success – most likely due to the cost and level of technicality involved.[181]

The purpose of this evaluation of the position of blind people in Britain is not to pit various groups against each other or dismiss the diversity of the blind community and the challenges individuals faced during the twentieth century. However, it is critical to establish that by the 1920s, significant progress had been made in establishing blind people as an important constituency to cater for and as a group that could make demands on both the public and the state. This allowed blind people's engagement with radio to become a matter of national importance and facilitated their access to the cultural forum. Additionally, it contextualises how members of the blind community could mediate this engagement, as they

---

[176] Blind Veterans UK, 'Our History', Blind Veterans UK <https://www.blindveterans.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/our-history/> [accessed 4 December 2022]
[177] Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 28.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Graeme Gooday and Karen Sayer, *Managing the Experience of Hearing Loss in Britain, 1830-1930* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 48.
[180] Matthew Rubery, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2016), p. 35.
[181] Ibid.

drew on previous successful campaigns for the welfare of the blind. They were able to suggest how radio should be engaged with to members of the blind community whilst also making the initiative appealing to both the government and the public, which in turn provided legislative and financial support for the campaign. The relative power of the blind community during this era meant that the charity, broadcasting and government organisations running the Wireless for the Blind Fund – aimed at providing free sets and licenses to blind people – could construct radio as an ideal cultural forum for blind people. By drawing on established tropes of blind people as deserving of radio access, they shaped ideas of blind people as deserving of sympathy but also as seeking education and civic engagement. These factors are highly relevant in later chapters of this thesis, as the deaf community lacked unity and public support, especially concerning access to cultural forums.

2.2. Connecting radio and disability: The Wireless for Hospitals Fund, 1919-1925

In the mid-1920s, officials of organisations such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind and St Dunstan's Veterans Hospital were becoming interested in the potential of radio for blind people. What had been a hobby was framed by some of the individuals involved in the charities as a massive boon for blind people. A few informal schemes were set up, eventually solidified as the Wireless for the Blind Fund in late 1929. Slightly ahead of them, however, was an initiative to provide access to radio broadcasts to patients convalescing in hospitals. The *Daily News*, a newspaper launched and briefly edited by writer and social critic Charles Dickins in 1846, created the 'Wireless for Hospitals Fund'.[182] The fund aimed to raise money and supply wireless equipment so that 'not a bed in any London hospital will be without an earphone.'[183] The initiative was aimed at all ill people in hospital, not just blind people or those with eye conditions. By exploring one of these early initiatives, I can establish why and how radio was connected to various causes during the early twentieth century and how the blind community – whose members used their previously established powerful social and political position – became most commonly associated with the cultural forum.

In the early and mid-1920s, various groups discussed radio broadcasts' potential uses and benefits. One of these groups was those involved in hospital administration and medical

[182] The Times Digital Archive (TDA), 'Wireless in Hospitals', *The Times*, Issue 44075 (24 September 1925), p. 13.
[183] Ibid.

practice. Live entertainment performances for soldiers and wounded veterans were standard during this period, and in 1922 *The Times* reported that the Adair Wounded Fund, during a concert for 1000 injured soldiers, announced that it was planning 'in a month's time to broadcast the concerts, and to present wireless sets to various hospitals.'[184] Hospital officials also saw the potential of radio as a fundraising tool. Lord Knutsford, the chairman of the London Hospital, made a broadcast appeal in May of 1923 for public donations to the hospital. Reporting on this, *The Times* wrote that 'charitable appeals have been made by wireless before, but in this case the experiment has been remarkably successful.'[185] In exploring later charity appeals in this thesis, broadcast appeals from officials, politicians and celebrities would become commonplace in the subsequent decades.

In January 1924, *The Manchester Guardian* reported on Dr Walter K. Foley, the chief of medical services at the United States Veterans Bureau in Minneapolis.[186] The newspaper reported that Foley advocated wireless broadcasts as a supplementary treatment for tuberculosis, printing his comment that 'a radio set will do more to cure tuberculosis than any other apparatus yet devised […] The boys forget their troubles with radio. I would rather give a patient a radio set than a whole handful of pills.'[187]

The desire to include comfort and leisure to patients in a medical setting was not a new phenomenon. Historian Victoria Bates has written on the process of 'humanising' hospitals.[188] 'Humanising' was an umbrella term that describes the inclusion of 'patient agency, individualism and holism' in medical settings.[189] She dates the beginning of concerns around 'the loss of the 'human' aspect of medicine' among the medical community to the Victorian era.[190] The Wireless in Hospitals Fund was a continuation of the attempts to provide a less medicalised, technological experience to hospital patients, one that considered their sensory and psychological needs as well as their physical. Michael H. Thaut is a professor of music, rehabilitation, and neuroscience.[191] He has written on the long history of music in medicine, arguing that the belief in music as a method of healing has always existed

[184] TDA, 'Wireless Concerts For the Wounded', *The Times*, Issue 43145 (25 September 1922), p. 8.
[185] TDA, 'The London Hospital – Response to Broadcast Appeal', *The Times*, Issue 43354 (30 May 1923), p. 15.
[186] ProQuest: British Periodicals (PQBP), 'Wireless As Tuberculosis Treatment', *The Manchester Guardian* (30 January 1924), p. 4.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Victoria Bates, ''Humanizing' healthcare environments: architecture, art and design in modern hospitals', *Design for Health* 2(2018), 7.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid., p. 6-7.
[191] Michael H. Thaut, 'Music as therapy in early history', *Progress in Brain Research* 217(2015), 143.

across many cultures.[192] It was not until the 19th and 20th centuries that the study of music therapy became a formal science. Thaut writes that as understanding of different diseases changed, so did ideas of how music could be used in medicine.[193] Previous explorations of music therapy provide context as to why medical experts were keen to expose hospital patients to radio, and why the Fund was so successful.

Belief in the potential benefits of radio in UK hospitals led the formal fund to provide sets, headphones, and loudspeakers to wards and created coalitions between important institutions. The *Daily News* initiated the Wireless for Hospitals Fund, aiming 'to equip all the hospitals in London with wireless reception apparatus so that the occupant of every bed can listen-in to broadcasting programmes.'[194] *The Times* reported that the fund was 'being promoted with the cordial cooperation of the British Broadcasting Company' and that senior members of the royal family had donated £250 personally.[195] The article also revealed some of the practicalities of providing London's 25,000 hospital beds with radio equipment:

> Makers of wireless apparatus have given apparatus, and two firms have undertaken to equip at their sole expense the Hospital for Children and Women, Waterloo Road, and the London Ophthalmic Hospital, King William Street.[196]

Other hospitals would have their equipment sourced through the funds raised. The BBC also offered advice, with 'technical members of the council' drawing up a 'standard specification of hospital wireless equipment.'[197]

There were those, however, who cautioned against being overly optimistic and ambitious about the potential of radio in hospitals. A correspondent for *The Manchester Guardian* wrote that 'it is commonly supposed that this is one of the simplest as well as one of the most praiseworthy purposes to which the reception of broadcast radio-telephony can be put.'[198] However, they were concerned that some practicalities were not being considered. For example, for the equipment to be reliable and sustainable, good signals and high-quality loudspeakers were required.[199] Additionally, the apparatus needed to be simple enough for

---

[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.
[194] TDA, 'Wireless in London Hospitals – Listening in Apparatus for the Wards' *The Times*, Issue 43978 (3 June 1925), p. 17.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] TDA, 'Wireless for Hospitals Fund' *The Times*, Issue 43997 (25 June 1925), p. 8.
[198] PQBP, 'Wireless Notes and Programmes: Wireless in Hospitals', *The Manchester Guardian* (18 September 1925), p. 11.
[199] Ibid.

anyone to operate, or a hospital staff member would always have to man the sets to assist.[200] The correspondent also suggested that spare parts needed to be stored and that hospital porters should be trained in wireless repairs. [201] Despite this, the scheme successfully provided the necessary equipment to London hospitals. As soon as late 1926, *The Times* reported that the scheme had been 'completed'.[202] The Lord Mayor hosted a celebration luncheon, during which the BBC and its director, Lord Reith, were thanked.[203]

In my search of online newspaper archives, I found articles that revealed snippets of broader themes and debates in Britain during the period that fed into the campaign. In late 1925 the Postmaster-General, (the position that controlled broadcasting licensing), Sir William Michell-Thomson, presented a wireless installation purchased through the *Daily News* scheme to St Mary's Hospital in Paddington.[204] Whilst there, he was reported to have commented that he was unsure of the future of broadcasting in Britain. *The Times*, reporting on his comments, wrote that they thought broadcasting would be an enduring feature of British life.[205] Later that month, Captain Eckersley, the chief engineer at the British Broadcasting Company, presented a wireless installation to St Bartholomew's Hospital, also acquired through the official fund.[206] He commented that the BBC hoped to increase its facilities 'to be able to give listeners a choice of programmes', something he saw as particularly important for hospital patients.[207] His statement indicates that the BBC had large ambitions, and one way to express them was to promote the benefit to those in need.

The desire to provide hospital patients with the radio also impacted the broadcasting of sports events. In April 1930, an agreement between the BBC and the Football Association was made so that the BBC could broadcast a running commentary of the Cup Final.[208] The BBC had previously acquired permission from the FA; however, they now 'could not agree on the terms.'[209] *The Manchester Guardian* commented that Dr Philip Eliot, the Bishop of

---

[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.
[202] TDA, 'Wireless in Hospitals – *Daily News* Scheme Completed', *The Times,* Issue 44419 (3 November 1926), p. 11.
[203] Ibid.
[204] TDA, 'Broadcasting and the National Life – Postmaster General on a Growing Factor' *The Times,* Issue 44133 (1 December 1925), p.25.
[205] Ibid.
[206] PQBP, 'Wireless Notes and Programmes: Giving a Choice of Programmes a Special Provision for Hospitals?' *The Manchester Guardian* (23 December 1925), p. 11.
[207] Ibid.
[208] PQBP, 'Cup Final to be Broadcast: FA and BBC Agree' *The Manchester Guardian* (9 April 1930), p. 11.
[209] Ibid.

Buckingham, 'made a strong appeal for the match to be broadcast. He said he was a chairman of a hospital, and he knew what wireless meant to the patients.'[210]

The campaign's success was aided by its limited purview: to provide hospital patients in London with access to radio broadcasts. There were, however, some attempts to set up limited, similar initiatives outside of the capital. In 1925, the Huddersfield Victoria Nurses Association arranged for single-valve wireless receiver sets to be installed in the houses of '30 needy people for the benefit of bedridden persons, whose lot will be thoroughly brightened.'[211] The money for this was raised through public donations, and *The Times* reported that 'arrangements are being made for maintenance of the sets by amateurs who live close by.'[212]

My research also revealed that providing radio sets to hospital patients raised wider debates on charity and who was 'worthy' of the luxury. *The Manchester Guardian* commented on a discussion of the use of public funds to supply radios to hospitals outside of the London scheme. In January 1925, the newspaper reported that the Wigan Board of Guardians had agreed to the purchase of a radio set for fifty five pounds for a workhouse hospital, the Union Hospital at Billinge.[213] The paper reported that a member of the board of guardians had declared that he did not think 'a single ratepayer' would object to the purchase of a wireless set, as it would ultimately save money on hosting live performers at the hospital.[214]

Two years later, however, *The Manchester Guardian* questioned the legality of boards for 'poor-law hospitals' purchasing radio sets with public money.[215] The newspaper wrote in August 1927 that:

> The legality of a Poor Law authorities proposal to spend ratepayers' money on a scheme outside the duties for which it was elected may be raised by the decision of the Southwark Guardians to install a wireless apparatus at their hospital at Dulwich.[216]

The board had applied to the Ministry of Health for permission; however, they were warned that a district auditor might object to the purchase. The newspaper commented that the parish

---

[210] Ibid.
[211] TDA, 'Wireless in London Hospitals' *The Times*, Issue 44075 (24 September 1925), p. 6.
[212] Ibid.
[213] PQBP, 'Wireless for Workhouse Hospital', *The Manchester Guardian* (5 January 1925), p. 11.
[214] Ibid.
[215] PQBP, 'Wireless Sets for Poor-Law Hospitals: Is Board's Expenditure Legal?' *The Manchester Guardian* (17 August 1927), p. 10.
[216] Ibid.

next door, Lambeth, had raised the money for their wireless hospital equipment and installation through a separate public fundraising scheme.[217] *The Manchester Guardian* did not think this would work in Southwark, however, 'in view of the small area of the borough and financial position of its inhabitants.'[218] In Southwark, nine thousand people out of a population of 184,400 received poor law relief, and the local guardians 'in view of the local financial position, hold the view that the cost of the installation can be borne only by public funds.'[219] These debates show the privileged position of some regions of the country, namely London and more affluent areas, in acquiring access to radio in hospitals.

The question of who was considered 'worthy' of charity and sympathy was also highlighted by some of the articles in *The Times's* coverage of the official Wireless in Hospitals Fund. In March 1926, the Home Secretary Sir William Joyson-Hicks presented a wireless installation at the Prince of Wales Hospital, Tottenham.[220] Mr Hugh Jones, the editor of the *Daily News* – the newspaper responsible for the scheme – 'offered to supply an installation to a prison as an experiment.'[221] *The Times* reported, however, that the Home Secretary 'could not see his way to accept this, but invited Mr Jones to supply installations to some of the Borstal institutions.'[222] Borstals were detention centres for young offenders. Mr Jones later said, 'one boys' institution and one girls' institution should be supplied.'[223] In the November of that year, at the luncheon celebrating the successful completion of the scheme in London, the Home Secretary stated, 'I could not allow wireless in the prisons' but that the installations in the two borstals were 'a wonderful thing.'[224] Debates around access to sound and 'worthiness' can also be found in disability and D/deaf histories, for example Douglas Baynton's work on speech and sound as a mark of 'normality' used to discriminate against Deaf people in the 19th century, and Evan Sullivans concept of 'sound citizenship'.[225] Sullivan argued that the ability of deafened American First World War veterans to interact

[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.
[220] TDA, 'Wireless Sets for Hospitals', *The Times*, Issue 44228 (24 March 1926), p. 13.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid.
[224] TDA, 'Wireless in Hospitals – *Daily News* Scheme Completed', *The Times*, Issue 44419 (3 November 1926), p. 11.
[225] Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 5.
Evan Sullivan, 'Sound Citizenship: Hearing and Speech Disabilities in World War I', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 3(2023), 296.

with speech and sound was used to judge their worthiness and place within American society.[226]

Most significantly, the London Wireless in Hospitals Fund demonstrated that blind people were considered to benefit from radio above all others, even at this early stage. The first two hospitals to have their wireless equipment ceremonially 'opened', the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital and Moorfields Eye Hospital in June 1925, both specialised in treating eyes and vision.[227] *The Times* covered the openings of both hospital's wireless systems, explaining that the new wireless equipment was an escape from the 'complete or partial darkness' patients endured.'[228] Hospital Chairman Mr Theodore W. Ludwig also hailed the arrival of the apparatus, claiming that it would aid 'inducing an atmosphere cheerfulness and optimism.'[229] The Lady Mayoress of London, who attended one of the opening ceremonies, celebrated the wireless as an 'invisible companion' for patients.[230]

In their article on the opening of the Moorfields equipment, *The Times* were explicit in their support for the scheme:

> There can be no calling it a luxury. Whatever helps to cheer and to distract a sick person from his own thoughts, and perhaps, also, from his surroundings in a ward, is calculated to help his recovery. Patients cannot always be reading; blind patients, or those suffering from eye troubles which confine them to the dark, obviously cannot; and to be able to listen at will, without compulsion and without interfering with others […] is an immense resource, as many have found who have been ill in their own homes.
>
> Were there no wireless in hospitals there might well be reluctance to go into one if the pleasures of listening had to be foregone. […] The friendly wireless, having come into the private sickroom, now comes quite naturally, to the hospital bedside. The probability is that a few years hence physicians and nurses will be wondering how a ward could ever have been run without it.[231]

The publication's comments demonstrate the early connection made between radio and its uses for blind people and the importance already placed on supplying wireless broadcasts to hospital patients. The following year, Lord Knutsford, a great supporter of the scheme and bridge between the scheme and the BBC, stated that as chairman of the London Hospital 'in

---

[226] Ibid.
[227] TDA, 'Wireless in London Hospitals' *The Times*, Issue 44075 (24 September 1925), p. 6.
TDA, 'Wireless in Hospitals' *The Times*, Issue 44075 (24 September 1925), p. 13.
[228] TDA, 'Wireless in London Hospitals' *The Times*, Issue 44075 (24 September 1925), p. 6.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.
[231] TDA, 'Wireless in Hospitals' *The Times*, Issue 44075 (24 September 1925), p. 13.

30 years […] he did not know of anything that had given such satisfaction as two things; one was in allowing the patients to smoke, and the other in giving the wireless.'[232]

The rumblings of a few interested individuals were formalised into a campaign by an official organisation, the *Daily News* newspaper. Prominent figures including the post-master general, BBC and local officials, lent their expertise and in some cases finances to the cause. The former gave the campaign credibility and raised public awareness. There was also an obvious and limited aim of the campaign – the scheme only covered patients in hospitals and within London. This would have made it easy to convey and understandable to those without knowledge of radio or a personal tie to the cause.

The scheme also raised debates published in popular newspapers on who was 'worthy' of the perceived benefits of wireless apparatus and broadcasts. Hospital patients were portrayed as deserving of the technology, particularly those unable to see due to a medical procedure or existing visual impairment. As explored by Graeme Gooday and Karen Sayer, as well as Julie Anderson, blind people were considered to have more tragic circumstances than other groups of disabled people, including deaf people.[233] They also held greater political power than other disabled groups during the era.[234] The Wireless for the Blind campaign would capitalise on this, cementing in the minds of the public, relevant institutions, and blind people themselves that radio was a natural, almost inevitable benefit to them.

The Wireless in Hospitals Fund was not only a precursor to the Wireless for the Blind Fund but also served as another example of how different groups engaged with radio, how this engagement was mediated, and how both radio and specific communities could be simultaneously shaped. The initiation and success of the fund demonstrated that as more people were using radio, some were carefully considering who could engage with it and how this engagement may take place. As those in the above examples demonstrate, there was massive optimism regarding what radio could be used for, which allowed those running the Wireless in Hospitals Fund to mediate patients' engagement with radio in the way that they felt was most beneficial. This mediation prioritised those who were blind or having their vision cared for. The result of the fund, namely access to radio sets for all London-based

[232] TDA, 'Wireless a boon for Hospital Patients' *The Times*, Issue 44167 (12 January 1926), p. 17.
[233] Anderson, p. 28.
Gooday and Sayer, p. 48.
[234] Anderson, p. 28.

hospital patients, highlighted how a specific group of people could be connected in the public imagination with radio and be perceived as worthy of that access. In turn, those running the fund and similar initiatives constructed radio as, at the very least, a compensation for the struggles patients were enduring and, at most, of therapeutic value. In prioritising blind patients or those whose vision was affected by illness or clinical treatment, those running the fund co-constructed radio as an ideal cultural forum for blind people and blind people as the worthiest recipients of radio access.

2.3. The Wireless for the Blind Fund, 1929-today

2.3i. The early days: developments and use

In this section of the chapter, I will examine the formation of the Wireless for the Bind Fund in the 1920s. The fund was formed by several bodies representing blind people alongside the BBC.[235] Significantly, it had the cooperation of two prominent charities for blind people – St Dunstan's Hospital for Blinded Veterans and the Royal National Institute for the Blind (henceforth St Dunstan's and RNIB). Using institutional records from both charities, alongside online newspaper archives, I will document the formation of the campaign. In the following sections, I will also examine its success and legacy.

Of the two charities, St Dunstan's took the earliest interest in radio technology. This was mainly due to its vice-chairman, Captain Ian Fraser (1897-1974). Fraser's speech to the House of Commons, as quoted at the start of this chapter, ensured the passing of the Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill in 1926.[236] A First World War veteran blinded during the battle of the Somme and Member of Parliament from the mid-1920s, Fraser fostered an interest in wireless technology from an early age.[237] In his biography, *My Story of St Dunstan's*, Fraser describes himself as 'partly responsible' for wireless being 'a popular hobby at St Dunstan's before there was any BBC', as 'I had been a wireless fiend when I was

[235] London, Royal National Institute for the Blind Archive (RNIB), Royal Family Correspondence 1935-1937 Box 1 76.6 CRO/144 G125, Wireless for the Blind Fund Chairman Sir Beachcroft Towse to Sir Lionel Halsey at St James's Palace, 12 March 1936.
The bodies listed as being involved in the Wireless for the Blind Fund: The National Institute for the Blind; St Dunstan's for Blinded Soldiers; Sailors and Airmen, Union of Counties Association for the Blind in England and Wales; Scottish National Federation of Institutions and Societies for the Blind; Blind Welfare Committee (Northern Ireland); British Broadcasting Corporation.
[236] Hansard, Commons Sitting, HC Deb 10 November 1926 vol 199 cc1086-8, 'Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities, Hansard, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1926/nov/10/wireless-telegraphy-blind-persons> [accessed 6 October 2021].
[237] Lord Fraser of Lonsdale, *My Story of St Dunstan's* (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 112.

still in school.'[238] During the war, he became a signals officer, and at St Dunstan's in the mid-1920s, he began experimenting with wireless technology as a hobby. This was not unusual among military men of the First World War. Peter Scott wrote that 'military demand' during the war 'greatly accelerated both technical development and output for the infant British radio equipment industry.[239] A side effect of this was that 'war surplus equipment and skills acquired during military service generated a substantial community of enthusiast radio 'hams', who constituted both an initial market for entertainment radio and a major source of early radio entrepreneurs.'[240]

Fraser was one of these so-called 'hams', as his passion for the potential of broadcasting was evident in his work as he described himself as 'nagging ministers' during Question Time in the House of Commons until 'perhaps to shut me up – they appointed me to the Crawford Committee on Broadcasting in 1925.'[241] Fraser combined his passion for wireless and broadcasting with his work with fellow blinded veterans by setting up an initiative in which all St Dunstaners, as members were known, were provided with radios and he served as vice-chair of the Wireless for the Blind Fund from 1930.[242]

The 'St Dunstaners' involvement also added weight to the campaign. Julie Anderson has written that 'St Dunstan's men were an essentially privileged group, who received many concessions and charitable donations, owing to a shrewd publicity campaign which made much of their status as 'heroic' war blind.'[243] According to Anderson, the veterans of St Dunstan's strived to create a new category of blind person: not the scorned blind beggar or pitied civilian blind reliant on charity, but an elevated group of capable men not hindered by sight loss.[244]

In 1922, Fraser was keen to demonstrate how enjoyable wireless could be for St Dunstaners. In October, he invited a group affiliated with the charity to listen to the Prince of

---

[238] Ibid., p. 113.
[239] Peter Scott, *The Market Makers – Creating Mass Markets for Consumer Durables in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 132.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid.
The Crawford Committee decided on the monopolisation of British broadcasting and the creation of the British Broadcasting Company.
[242] London, Blind Veterans UK Archive (BVUK), 'Wireless at St Dunstan's' *The St Dunstan's Review* 69.VII (1922), p. 9.
BVUK, 'The Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill – The First Reading' *The St Dunstan's Review* 114.XI (1926), p. 21.
BVUK, 'The British Wireless For The Blind Fund' *The St Dunstan's Review* 140.XIV (1930), p. 19.
[243] Ibid., p. 28-29.
[244] Ibid., p. 50

Wales broadcast a speech.[245] An attendee reported to *The St Dunstan's Review* that they were pleasantly surprised by the clarity of the Prince's voice:

> As clearly as though he were standing in the room addressing every one of us personally […] it seemed impossible to believe that he was sitting in his study talking into what we were told looked for all the world like an ordinary telephone, for his speech had none of the pauses and "noises for nowhere" one would expect from an instrument however perfect.[246]

The author's testimony reveals one of the ways in which Captain Fraser convinced people of the enjoyment blind veterans could find in radio and the quality of the technology itself. In November of that year, *The St Dunstan's Review* printed a lecture by Fraser in which he further impressed the point.[247] In it, he declared that radio would 'make the United Kingdom a smaller place,' alongside helping the British Empire and the individuals within it to be 'more closely knit together.'[248] Fraser suggests that distance should be measured in the speed of communication between different locations rather than in the actual miles between them.[249] This idea of bringing nations and individuals closer together through radio is similar to Rebecca Scales' concept of 'the radio nation', part of which included French veterans blinded and deafened in the First World War being reabsorbed into national life through broadcasting.[250] Fraser's ideas about communication and enthusiasm for radios for blind veterans suggest that he held similar views.

During the early twenties, before any official funds or schemes, Fraser arranged access to radio for St Dunstaners by contacting Wireless Societies.[251] He wrote realistically of the challenges blind people faced when engaging with radio sets. He claimed that blind men could look after the equipment and tune it but would need assistance installing aerials and purchasing and fixing sets.[252] By 1926, Captain Fraser had escalated his campaign to grant free wireless licences to all blind people, beyond just the veterans at St Dunstan's. This was when he began his work on The Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill.[253] The *St Dunstan's Review*, whilst inclined to write favourably about their vice-chairman, reported

---

[245] BVUK, 'Wireless at St Dunstan's' *The St Dunstan's Review* 69.VII (1922), p. 9.
[246] Ibid.
[247] BVUK, 'Wireless – A new hobby for the blind' *The St Dunstan's Review* 28.VII (1922), p. 12.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Rebecca Scales, *Radio and the Politics of Sound in Interwar France, 1921-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 4.
[251] BVUK, 'Wireless' *The St Dunstan's Review* 71.VII (1922), p. 19.
[252] Ibid.
[253] BVUK, 'The Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill – The First Reading' *The St Dunstan's Review* 114.XI (1922), p. 21.

Fraser's speech in the House of Commons as 'so well understood and so sympathetically received.'[254] They claimed it was reported in 'practically every London newspaper of importance, and many leading Provincial and Northern publications.'[255]

By 1926, members of RNIB were also writing about the potential of radio for blind people and experimenting with ways to provide them with the necessary equipment and support. They proposed a scheme whereby spare radios could be donated to blind people. Wireless companies and professionals were involved voluntarily; for example, the Wireless League offered to support the initiative, and the General Electric Company donated £50 worth of wireless sets to the Barclay Workshop for Blind Women.[256] Smaller, individual funds were also gathered from disparate sources; for example, 1000 guineas were left in a patron's will to provide RNIB service users with wireless access.[257] These methods of providing wireless sets demonstrate that there was no organised scheme at this point. Rather than a government initiative or formalised fund, businesses and donations were used to provide wireless access to blind people.

In an Annual Report, the RNIB made their support of wireless as a benefit to blind people known:

> Wireless has not only brought endless pleasure to blind people, but has literally changed their entire outlook. With the headphones at his ears, a blind man is equal in all respects to a man with sight; the whole world is open to him, and he can become acquainted with life from every aspect revealed by the microphone.[258]

By 1928, RNIB hinted that discussions were taking place regarding a national scheme for the provision of wireless for blind people, but could not give any details other than to say it was a 'question of national importance – almost more important in these days than the provision of embossed literature.'[259] The elevation of radio to a similar status as braille literature is of huge significance, as it reveals the value placed on auditory media for blind people. In 1929, the charity reported that there were large waiting lists for wireless sets and emphasised the continued importance of the technology.'[260]

---

[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Ibid.
[259] RNIB, *Royal National Institute for the Blind Annual Report 1927-28*, p. 37.
[260] RNIB, *Royal National Institute for the Blind Annual Report 1928-29*, p. 18.
Ibid., p. 33.

Four years after the passing of the 1926 Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill, St Dunstan's, headed by Captain Fraser, and RNIB joined forces to ensure that both blind civilians and veterans had access to the wireless sets themselves. This was not the first such initiative that Fraser had been part of. Historian Matthew Rubery has written on Frasers instrumental role in creating the 'talking book library' for St Dunstan's veterans.[261] He initiated the scheme and worked with recording engineers to trail recording books and poetry onto gramophone records.[262]

Together, representatives from St Dunstan's and RNIB founded the Wireless for the Blind Fund. In January 1930, Captain Fraser wrote, 'The object of the fund is to secure that so far as it is practical every blind person in the United Kingdom has a wireless set.'[263] He continued to state that as St Dunstan's had already provided most of its members with sets, 'the British Wireless for the Blind Fund is mainly concerned with the thousands of civilian blind people who as yet have no wireless sets.'[264] He announced that he would serve as vice-chair of the fund and that new members of St Dunstan's would receive their wireless sets through it, marking a merge in the provision for blind veterans and citizens.[265] The official 'Wireless for the Blind Fund' was launched on Christmas Day 1929 with a radio appeal by Winston Churchill.[266] The RNIB reported that:

> The response was immediate, and to date the fund amounts to £15,500 in cash, while members of the wireless trade have promised to provide 1000 complete valve installations.[267]

In their annual reports and their official in-house journal, *The New Beacon* (henceforth *TNB*), RNIB appeared content to report on the endeavours of Captain Fraser in securing and promoting the fund. However, they were concerned with what the use of wireless would be once most blind people had access to it. Education was an important potential use.[268] In April 1929, Mr Randall of the Adult Education Section of the BBC wrote an article in *TNB* encouraging the formation of listening and discussion groups.[269] Randall claimed that there

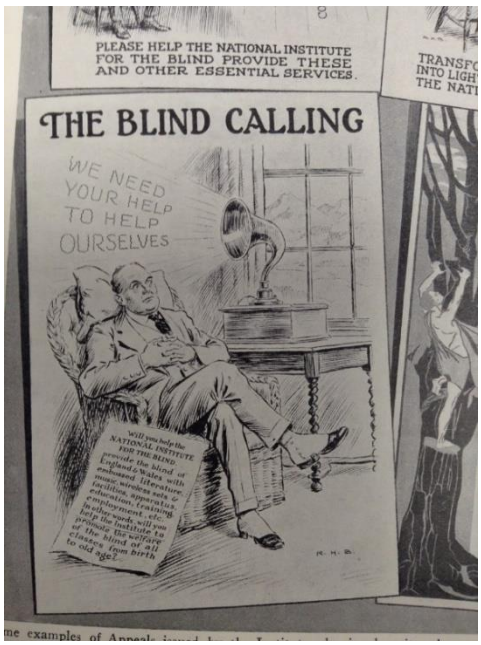
---

[261] Matthew Rubery, 'From Shell Shock to Shellac: The Great War, Blindness, and Britain's Talking Book Library', *Twentieth Century British History* 26(2015), 6.
[262] Ibid.
[263] BVUK, 'The British Wireless For The Blind Fund' *The St Dunstan's Review* 140.XIV (1930), p. 19.
[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid.
[266] RNIB, *Royal National Institute for the Blind Annual Report 1930*, p. 10.
[267] Ibid., p. 11.
[268] Ibid.
[269] RNIB, 'Free Licenses Available', *The New Beacon* 13.148 (April 1929), p. 5.

were ‘four essentials’ for a successful discussion group: a good group leader, a suitable meeting place, good wireless reception, and communication with the BBC.[270]

In the November of that year, another article in the magazine reported on a speech made by the Archbishop of York, Mr G. H. Cater, to the Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education.[271] The Archbishop was ‘an enthusiastic believer in the possible value of broadcasting as an instrument of education and the promotion of national culture generally.’[272] He encouraged discussion groups for blind people to engage with the information they received through their sets actively.[273] It is clear that for RNIB members, wireless was never intended to be a passive pastime but an act of personal betterment and public engagement. This is even evident in their advertising and campaigning. In their 1926-1927 Annual Report, RNIB, even in the earliest days of wireless being connected with the welfare of blind people, promoted the technology’s ability to help blind people improve their circumstances. In the report, they printed samples of their posters, one of which, as shown in Figure 1[274], depicts a well-dressed man listening to a gramophone blaring out the slogan ‘we need your help to help ourselves’. The smaller text on the poster lists the provision of wireless sets as a way for the donators to help blind people.[275]

Figure 1[276]



[270] Ibid.
[271] RNIB, ‘Educating the Blind By Wireless’, *The New Beacon* 13.155 (November 1929), p.1.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ibid., p. 2.
[274] RNIB, *Royal National Institute for the Blind Annual Report 1926-27*, p. 27.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid.

As an auditory cultural forum, radio benefitted blind people as an alternative to books, newspapers, or other areas of life that they may have struggled to access. Individuals such as Captain Fraser and those who wrote for the RNIB hugely emphasised what they saw as the benefits of radio for blind people and the effect it could have on their lives. They perceived blind people's engagement not only on the level of individual enjoyment and benefit but also as elevating the whole blind community. As will be established in the following section, the powerful union of the RNIB and St Dunstan's meant that these internal discussions about radio were able to be formalised into a fund and promoted outside of the blind community, a process which co-constructed radio as an ideal cultural forum for blind people, and blind people as capable, intelligent, and eager to take part in civic life.

2.3ii. RNIB and St Dunstan's: A powerful coalition

As relayed in section 2.1, the position of blind people as a political and social force in Britain was established in the early twentieth century. Those involved in the organisation of the Wireless for the Blind Fund could utilise this and contribute to how blindness was considered in the public imagination. St Dunstan's and RNIB took an active role, using the social capital offered by the position of blinded veterans to portray blind people as in need of and worthy of assistance. Here, I will explore the mechanisms of how they were able to do this – something significant when examining the success of the campaign in subsequent sections of this chapter.

RNIB was a charity primarily aimed at helping blind civilians, whilst St Dunstan's supported blind veterans. The inclusion of veterans in the movement to access radio garnered political and public support, allowing the passing of the Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill. It also helped to draw in the support of prominent figures and the influx of public donations. As Julie Anderson has documented, 'St Dunstaners presented themselves as capable, active societal participants.[277] This gave them political authority and power, which was enhanced by their vice-chairman Captain Ian Fraser. Fraser had the additional benefits of being a member of parliament and an aristocrat.[278]

In the 1920s, there was an emerging sense of responsibility for those injured serving Britain in the First World War, both by the political elites and the public.[279] This increased

[277] Anderson, p. 50.
[278] Lonsdale, p. 112.
[279] Rubery, p. 130.

the likelihood that an organisation involved in helping to rehabilitate and support blinded veterans would hold significant social and political sway. This was certainly the case when Fraser introduced the Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill to the House of Commons. The editor of the St Dunstan's Review reprinted several quotes from popular mainstream press outlets: *The Times* is quoted as having written that 'Captain Fraser today gained the sympathy of the whole House.[280] *The Daily Telegraph* reported on the cross-party support for the initiative as 'all parties in the House of Commons yesterday gave a sympathetic reception.'[281] The political support for the bill and its perceived national importance was also demonstrated by the fact that, as the *Daily Herald* reported, the House of Commons 'filled up for a few minutes.'[282]

The date Fraser chose to introduce the bill was also significant. , Fraser introduced it on the 10th of November. Subsequently, newspaper coverage of the subject was printed on the 11th, Armistice Day. *The Manchester Guardian* picked up on this, commenting:

> That the beneficiaries include 1,500 men who, like the sponsor of the Bill [Captain Fraser], lost their sight in the war make the measure a singularly right attendant on Armistice Day. But on any other day it would be an act of intelligent kindness.[283]

This illustrates, again, the successful combination of promoting the needs of blinded veterans within the blind campaign. As a knock-on effect, the power and privileges given to blinded veterans meant blind civilians benefitted due to the coalition of St Dunstan's and RNIB. In their 1930 financial report, RNIB credited the fund's success to the coalition of organisations, hailing it as an example of 'what unification can do.'[284] The political weight of having a veteran group involved continued to be of benefit throughout the century. In May 1965, *The St Dunstan's Review* reported that Captain Fraser asked the House of Lords for reassurance that wireless licenses would remain free for blind people.[285] They agreed, continuing a precedent that remains today and has also been extended to provide subsidies on television licences.

The combination of a civilian and veteran charity made it an attractive charitable cause for prominent figures to offer their time and support. The paper heading on a 1936

---

[280] BVUK, 'The Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill – The First Reading' *The St Dunstan's Review* 114.XI (1926), p. 21.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid.
[283] PQBP, 'The Blind Listener', *The Manchester Guardian* (11 November 1926), p. 8.
[284] RNIB, *Royal National Institute for the Blind Annual Report 1930*, p. 12.
[285] BVUK, 'Wireless' *The St Dunstan's Review* 554.XLIX (1965), p. 19.

letter between the chairman of the Wireless for the Blind Fund and an official at St James's Palace on behalf of the royal family reveals the prominent individuals involved.[286] A heading reading 'vice-presidents' includes the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi, The Moderator of the Church of Scotland, The Moderator of Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and the President of the Free Church Council.[287] During the early twentieth century, charities, especially large ones such as RNIB and St Dunstan's, had a strong religious element. The involvement of such prominent figures across denominations and even different religions highlighted the ease with which the initiative appealed to people.

As well as religious figures, the letter heading reveals an impressive list of political figures. This included Members of Parliament Stanley Baldwin, Winston Churchill, David Lloyd George, and Ramsey MacDonald – all significant figures of the era. The letters in the RNIB archive also revealed the support of royal figures. The Prince of Wales, at the time the future Edward VIII, was president of the fund at its initiation in 1929.[288] Following the abdication crisis in 1936, the RNIB quickly contacted St James's Palace and was reassured that the new King and Queen, alongside the dowager Queen, were still supporters of the charity.[289] The support of prominent figures was important as many similar initiatives within the deaf community lacked this and were less successful.

The most important organisation to support the Wireless for the Blind Fund was the BBC. Lord John Reith was the Director-General of the BBC during the initiation of the fund.[290] Within the 1936 letter heading, he is listed as a vice president. The BBC is also credited as a co-creator of the fund.[291] There are also smaller signifiers of the BBC's support of efforts to provide blind people with wireless. In RNIB's in-house publication, *The New Beacon*, a 1927 article reports on the production of embossed Braille editions of the BBC magazine *The Radio Times*. The BBC's role in constructing the connection between blind people and radio is beyond the remit of this thesis, but of note here is that a powerful

[286] RNIB, Royal Family Correspondence 1935-1937 Box 1 76.6 CRO/144 G125, Wireless for the Blind Fund Chairman Sir Beachcroft Towse to Sir Lionel Halsey at St James's Palace, 12 March 1936.
[287] Ibid.
[288] BVUK, Printed leaflet titled 'Let the Blind Hear – the full script of Winston Churchills 1929 Announcement of the Wireless for the Blind Fund', 1929, p.1.
[289] RNIB, Royal Family Correspondence 1935-1937 Box 1 76.6 CRO/144 G125, Wireless for the Blind Fund Chairman Sir Beachcroft Towse to Sir Lionel Halsey at St James's Palace, 12 March 1936.
[290] Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting Volume One 1922-1939* (Cambridge MA: Basil Blackwell Inc, 1991), 1, p. 7-9.
[291] RNIB, Royal Family Correspondence 1935-1937 Box 1 76.6 CRO/144 G125, Wireless for the Blind Fund Chairman Sir Beachcroft Towse to Sir Lionel Halsey at St James's Palace, 12 March 1936.

institution in Britain contributed and was committed to aiding blind people and, in their own interest, promoting the benefits of radio.

Radio was a cultural forum through which St Dunstan's could continue to shape ideas of blind people as capable and valuable. Meanwhile, RNIB could use the position of veterans to extrapolate those ideas to blind civilians also. The combination of a civilian and veteran organisation, alongside the BBC and influential figures, aided the success of the Wireless for the Blind Fund. The fund allowed figures within St Dunstan's to continue to promote their ideal of blinded veterans as capable, useful men, whilst the RNIB benefitted from having veterans, for whom the public supported state aid, involved, as blind civilians were able to benefit from their status. In highlighting the organisations and individuals involved in the fund, I have established some of the factors that made it a success and how blind people's engagement with radio was mediated. As powerful forces within the blind community, politics, and public life, those involved with the fund were able to shape who could use radio and for what purpose. Their elevated position in society co-constructed how people considered both blindness and radio, something which members of deaf organisations struggled to do in a positive light during the twentieth century.

2.3iii. Reactions and success

The success of the Wireless for the Blind Fund does not correlate with what disability activists would consider a successful campaign later in the century. It did not necessarily advance the rights of blind people, grant them autonomy, or alter the perception of blind people as victims of a tragic condition. By the standards of the era of this thesis, 1925-1960, however, it was a success. It was financially viable and had public attention and financial support. *TNB* regularly reported on the statistics of the Wireless for the Blind Fund. Before the implementation of the formal scheme in 1926, a few hundred sets were provided a year. Within a month of the Christmas 1929 appeal, £10,000 had been raised, with £12,000 having been donated by the February of 1930. A year later, in February 1931, the magazine reported that £30,000 had been raised for Wireless for the Blind.[292]

[292] RNIB, 'Wireless for the Blind', *The New Beacon* 10.113 (May 1926), p. 14.
RNIB, 'British Wireless for the Blind Fund', *The New Beacon* 14.157 (January 1930), p. 16.
RNIB, 'British Wireless for the Blind Fund', *The New Beacon* 14.158 (February 1930), p. 31.
RNIB, 'Wireless for the Blind - Review of the Work of the Wireless Fund', *The New Beacon* 15.170 (February 1930), p. 30.

Through my research, I have found evidence of positive reactions to the scheme, both from the public and blind people who were receiving the service. As an organ for RNIB, a key partner in the scheme, *TNB* would inevitably report favourable responses. However, it is worth dwelling on some of them as these testimonies added to public support for the fund.

TNB printed several letters from blind people who had benefitted from the scheme. For example, a contributor named only as 'L.F.' wrote in 1929, as the fund was being established:

> Sir,- The value of the wireless to us who are blind is beyond price; deprived as we are of the daily papers, we hear every evening through the general news bulletin the chief events of that day […] Our eyes are shut to these scenes, but the wireless gives us magic spectacles.[293]

In that same year, a letter from F. W. Storky of Norfolk to *The Radio Times* was reprinted in *TNB*:

> Being a blind man from birth, I should like to express to you my appreciation and gratitude for the BBC programmes generally, especially the daily morning service. It has bought new interest and happiness into my life. Being blind, I have a lot of time on my hands, and might often be melancholy if that blessing of wireless had not been discovered, and that with such a variety of programmes that completely take one out of oneself altogether – especially in my own case. Wireless has opened for me such inward light into new pleasures and delights that I am indeed a very grateful blind man.[294]

These letters demonstrate, on a surface level, the apparent uses blind people found for wireless – for news, religious engagement, entertainment and as a distraction from loneliness. More importantly for this thesis, they highlight uses set out by St Dunstan's and RNIB when promoting the need to establish and support the Wireless for the Blind Fund.

The benefit of wireless for blind people was naturally emphasised in the documents of the organisations running the campaign. However, this was also reflected in the newspaper coverage of the subject between 1925 and 1930. In 1927 *The Tatler and Bystander*, in their 'Notes from Here and There' column, supported donating wireless sets to blind people, not just in Britain but across Britain's empire, claiming that a £5 donation could 'provide two blind people with an endless source of happiness for the rest of their lives'[295] It is unclear where the publication sourced the information but it does, however, signal its support for the

[293] RNIB, L.F., Letter to The New Beacon, 'Value of Wireless', *The New Beacon* 13,151 (July 1929), p. 7.
[294] RNIB, F.W. Storky to *The Radio Times*, Reprinted in The New Beacon, 'A Wonderful Blessing' *The New Beacon* 13.154 (October 1929), p. 4.
[295] PQBP, 'Notes from here and there', *The Tatler and Bystander* 104.1349 (4 May 1927), p. xxvi.

cause. *The Sphere* also expressed its support for the official Wireless for the Blind Fund after it was announced in December 1929:

> It is obvious that no invention can help the blind so much as wireless. In fact, the value of wireless to the millions who can see is multiplied thousandfold to the thousands who cannot see. The blind necessarily have few interests, few amusements. Reading Braille with the fingers has done much to banish loneliness, but not all blind people can read with their fingers, and only a comparatively small number of books can ever be in Braille type. Broadcasting is the blind man's daily newspaper, his own personal means of entertainment, education and enlightenment […] He cannot be left without it.[296]

Along with the paternalistic attitudes towards blind people of the time, this quote reveals braille's limitations and the importance of wireless for blind people. This may have been informed by letters received by the publication, for example, this one from January 1925:

> A friend of mine who has all his life been a lover of books but has recently become blind, writes to tell me of his delight in broadcasting, and the joy which a wireless installation has been to him during the past year. I share his enthusiasm and sympathise. My eye-sight also is wearing away, and I cannot read as assiduously as I once could.[297]

This letter demonstrates the use radio could be for various levels of visual impairment, not just for those registered as medically blind. The author also questioned the extent to which wireless could be a substitute for books, suggesting that to be successful, 'men of letters' should guide the BBC's activities.[298] *The Manchester Guardian* also commented on the importance of aiding blind people in a way that promotes independence. In 1926, they stated that 'It is the excellent policy of those who have practical concern with the blind to accept no boon that will make them less self-reliant'; however, there was 'general approval' of the free licensing scheme.[299]

In 1930, the same newspaper published a write-in debate over broadcasting Christian religious services on Sunday evenings. Without consideration for those who could not attend, someone under the penname 'Lux' wrote that there was 'really no excuse for the religious service at 8 pm on Sundays' and that 'no religious person who [attends] church would stay at home because of a wireless recording.'[300] They also described broadcast services as a 'skeleton' of live church services. Two readers responded with letters highlighting the ableist

[296] PQBP, 'Wireless for the Blind', *The Sphere* 120.1563 (4 January 1930), p. 36.
[297] PQBP, 'The Newsletter Week by Week', *The Sphere* 100.1303 (10 Jan 1925), p. 30.
[298] Ibid.
[299] PQBP, 'The Blind Listener', *The Manchester Guardian* (11 November 1926), p. 8.
[300] PQBP, 'Letters to the Editor', *The Manchester Guardian* (25 January 1930), p. 9.

attitude of Lux. E. Barrow wrote that 'there are religious people who are invalids, and the service means much to them.'[301] Charles W. Railton commented:

> Surely a moment's reflection on the part of such objectors would call to their minds the tens, nay, hundreds, of thousands of listeners of all descriptions, many of them invalids, blind, and bedridden, by whom participation in a religious service is felt to be an incalculable blessing.[302]

These sources again pair with the arguments and aims of the official fund, that radio for blind people was invaluable and could lead to the social, religious, and personal betterment of blind people alongside being a relief from their disability.

Another strength of The Wireless for the Blind Fund was the realistic expectations of those who created it, something missing from similar, less successful campaigns later in the century. These will be explored in later chapters of this thesis. Throughout the campaign to provide blind people with radio access, both RNIB and St Dunstan's members were honest about the limitations of radio for blind people.

Despite his life-long enthusiasm for radio and its benefit to blind people, Fraser did have some early doubts. In a 1922 article for the *St Dunstan's Review*, the organisation's official magazine, he predicted that 'the broadcasting of wireless telephony to thousands of homes will become a feature of life in England.'[303] He warned, however, that the large amount of publicity surrounding technical developments in wireless technology had 'led the man on the street to an entirely wrong conception of its usefulness.'[304] An issue on which Fraser has serious doubts about the use of radio is whether news should be broadcast. Citing his own experience as someone who had been blind for almost half a decade, he wrote that 'I have had it bought to me every day what a clumsy and inefficient organ the ear is for this purpose, as compared to the eye.'[305] He went on to describe the benefits of having his secretary read newspapers to him in person:

> Firstly, I am able to have the newspapers read when I desire to hear them, and not at a particular time, such as would be imposed upon the listener to a broadcasted news service which at best could only be convenient to the majority of the listeners, and not to the individual.
>
> Secondly, my reader can pick out the particular newspapers which I like to hear, and by reading through the headlines and waiting for me to say yes, or no, before

[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.
[303] BVUK, 'Is News by Wireless Really Wanted?' *The St Dunstan's Review* 68.VIII (1922), p. 13.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Ibid.

> proceeding with the article or paragraph, can approximate in some measure to the efficiency and facility with which a sighted person glances at his paper and chooses what he wishes to read.[306]

Frasers comments not only reveal scepticism around the use of wireless, but also the deep class divides within the blind community regarding access to texts and reading.

In the early days of the campaign, the RNIB were very honest about the many elements of wireless ownership that had to be considered to make it a feasible scheme – for example, the need to set up licences, technical support, and teach blind people how to use the sets.[307] During this time, free licences had been granted to blind people. However, as MP Captain Ian Fraser illuminated, 'a free dog kennel is not of great use to one unable to afford a dog.'[308]

By the time of the Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill, Fraser was thoroughly convinced of the value of wireless for blind people. However, he remained realistic, carefully setting out during a debate in the House of Commons who exactly would be eligible for a free license.[309] He spoke of the clause in the bill which defined blind people, using the figures to reassure the House that passing the bill would not incur colossal expense:

> When account is taken of those blind persons who are too young to enjoy or use wireless, of those, unfortunately a large number, who are mentally deficient, and of those who reside in public or charitable institutions or schools, there remains a relatively small number of possible beneficiaries—not more than 25,000 or 30,000 persons, including 1,500 ex-service men. The outside maximum loss of revenue could not exceed £15,000 or £20,000.[310]

This was a tactical decision to ensure the passing of the bill and cross-party support for the initiative. As with the Wireless in Hospitals Fund, it also set an understandable and manageable target and purpose for the initiative.

The reservations and awareness of the limitations of the scheme by those in charge of it resulted in a comprehensive and successful campaign. As will be demonstrated later in the thesis, when other charities attempted to emulate this campaign later in the century, there was

---

[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid.
[308] Ibid.
[309] Hansard, Commons Sitting, HC Deb 10 November 1926 vol 199 cc1086-8, 'Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities, Hansard, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1926/nov/10/wireless-telegraphy-blind-persons> [accessed 6 October 2021].
[310] Ibid.

far less transparency over the limitations of providing certain groups with access to cultural forums.

2.4. Conclusion

The official Wireless for the Blind Fund and the general movement to provide blind people with access to wireless sets and broadcasts was, by the era's standards, a resounding success in the 1920s and 1930s. Its predecessor, the Wireless in Hospitals Fund, contributed to the growing consensus in Britain that radio could be of enormous value to specific groups in society. By prioritising hospitals that specialised in eye conditions and visual impairment, the association of radio as a boon for blind people was cemented. Once organisations established the fund for blind people, in particular RNIB and St Dunstan's, there were elements, such as the involvement of influential public figures, that aided its success and endurance.

The legacy of the Wireless for the Blind campaign, however, is not just a successful initiative that exists to this day. It helped to reinforce the position of blind people and blindness as a disability as being worthy of support – both socially and financially. It also helped to raise awareness of the number of blind people in Britain who required aid. The correlation between the fund and populations of blind people was noted in 1928 in reference to the seventh report of the Advisory Committee on the Welfare of the Blind.[311] In 1925, there were 42,140 registered blind people, and in 1927, there were 46,822. *The Times* wrote that 'there has not, however, in the opinion of the committee, been an actual increase in blindness.'[312] Instead, blind people applying for free broadcasting licences 'led to the discovery of a considerable number of blind persons previously unregistered.'[313] This is evidence of the impact blind people's engagement had on broader matters relating to blindness, such as who was officially recognised as blind and how the technology contributed to constructions of the disability.

Prevalence was not the only way the fund shaped ideas of blindness. The discourse around why blind people should have radio access promoted ideas of blind people as capable and intelligent, keen to use the cultural forum to 'better themselves' and participate in

[311] TDA, 'The Blind Population', *The Times*, Issue 44825 (24 February 1928), p. 8.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid.

national life. However, as Fraser's conditions on eligibility demonstrated, those who did not fit within the ideal concept of a blind individual were discounted – creating delineations within the community and showing the influence of those mediating who should engage with radio. The paternalism found within the reporting on the fund also demonstrates that the notion of blindness as a tragic condition and blind people as unequal to their sighted counterparts did endure.

Meanwhile, radio as a cultural forum was constructed in parallel as both an answer to a problem – entertaining, educating, and informing blind people – and as ideally suited to the disability. It was presented as a technological solution to something beyond the bounds of medicine. The endurance of the fund and connection in the public imagination with audio technology and blindness demonstrates how substantial this co-construction was within the blind community and the public mind.

The history of the Wireless for the Blind Fund is significant in the history of blindness when explored in isolation. It also informs and contextualises developments within the deaf community from 1925 to 1960. The blind community was presented to the public as a unified entity, whilst blind individuals were framed as worthy of radio access.

As will be established in the following chapters, as the twentieth century progressed, the deaf and hard of hearing community became increasingly fractured. As different types of deafness became more apparent, drawing neat connections between the deaf community and specific cultural forums became more challenging. Simultaneously, deaf organisations and journals became aligned with different ideas and identities. Unlike in the case of the Wireless for the Blind Fund, different groups took different approaches to how, or even if, deaf people should engage with radio, cinema, and television. Consequently, whilst ideas of blindness and radio were co-constructed relatively uniformly, ideas of deafness and the cultural forums were constructed in diverse and fractured ways. This meant that various attempts to connect deaf people with specific cultural forums in the public imagination, as had been done in the Wireless for the Blind Fund, were less successful. This is despite members of the deaf community obviously and vocally trying to emulate the campaign whilst also using it as an example of the lack of sympathy deaf people faced when compared to blind people.

In this chapter, I have explored the experiences blind people had with radio in the early twentieth century and the actions blind organisations took to encourage and facilitate their engagement with the cultural forum. In Chapter Three, I will further establish the

difference in the experiences deaf people had with radio and how this shaped both the deaf community and radio itself.

Chapter 3: Deafness, sound, and radio: The contested nature of new audio technologies, 1925-1945.

In exploring archival documents on the Wireless for the Blind Fund, one of the striking elements was the lack of polarised opinions on the utility of radio for blind people. The marriage of an auditory cultural forum and those who struggled with visual activities such as reading, cinema or theatre made sense to those within the blind community, the state, and the public. However, as I will investigate here, deaf and hard of hearing people's experiences with auditory technologies were more complex. Historians have paid little attention to deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with radio, either in terms of their use or rejection of the cultural forum.

During my archival research on this topic, two key findings stood out: within NID documents and deaf journals, radio was rarely mentioned. Where it was, it was to dismiss its usefulness to deaf and hard of hearing people or to lament it as a new area of exclusion. Officials within the NID, BDA and the editors of major deaf journals were preoccupied during 1925-1945 with other pressing matters relating to audio technology. These included developments in electronic hearing aids and the increased use of sirens as warning devices, especially during the Second World War.

The second finding is that in mainstream press articles, there was evidence of some deaf and hard of hearing people using radio or, at the very least, experimenting with ways to access it. This complicates the narrative set out by powerful actors within the British deaf community and reveals how deeply contested radio use was. As Coreen McGuire set out in her work on the telephone in Britain, as new auditory technologies were taken up en masse by the British public, new thresholds of deafness and hearing were drawn depending on who could use them.[314] This is also the case regarding the three cultural forums explored in this research. How, or if, to engage with them exposed dividing lines within the deaf and hard of hearing community. Whilst officials within the NID and deaf journals were constructing radio as a cultural forum with no place in the deaf community and deaf people as unable to use it, other simultaneous constructions of radio and deafness were taking place on an individual level, as people explored engaging with the forum.

[314] Coreen McGuire, *Measuring Difference, Numbering Normal, Setting the Standards for disability in the interwar period* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

In this chapter, I will investigate how, as technologies such as telephones and radio were used increasingly by large portions of the British population, deaf and hard of hearing people communicated with each other and found means to socialise. The emergence of deaf and hard of hearing clubs and the utilisation of local deaf news roundups in national deaf publications show the alternatives deaf and hard of hearing people found to new technologies. These activities within the deaf community explain why some who could have engaged with audio technologies did not: community members were finding alternative ways to achieve the benefits offered by emerging cultural forums.

I will then examine two areas of audio technology that affected the lives of deaf and hard of hearing people and the organisations surrounding them. I will review the NID''s response to hearing aid technology and Air Raid Precaution (ARP) sirens. These two subjects frequently appeared within NID archival sources, demonstrating that they were important to the organisation. As will be explored later in the chapter, the NID mediated which technologies they felt most worthy of focus, shaping how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with them. These two areas also demonstrate the complexity of new areas of inclusion and exclusion brought about by both technological advances and debate around access.

As explored in Chapter Two, organisations behind the Wireless for the Blind Fund were able to successfully present radio as an ideal cultural forum for blind people. The NID, perhaps predictably, took a strong stance against radio being of use to deaf people and of benefit to only a small portion of hard of hearing people. They did, however, utilise BBC charity broadcasts, affirming that radio may not be for deaf people but could aid their welfare if used effectively by hearing people.

Another element of deaf people's association with radio was how the mainstream press used the two topics in their reporting on fears around noise and modernity in the twentieth century. Claims that deafness was an advantage as the sonic environment of Britain changed constructed certain radio broadcasts – such as jazz and American music – as detrimental and deaf people as, through their lack of engagement, bastions of a simpler, better era. This demonstrates how the perceived engagement of deaf and hard of hearing people was being mediated by hearing people and shaped into a tale of morality or a warning.

The final section of this chapter will problematise the narrative put forward by the NID and mainstream press that radio and deaf people were not compatible. Through my

archival work, I found anecdotal evidence of deaf and hard of hearing people using the radio, with their struggles and enjoyment documented. The dominant and enduring narrative of deaf people's engagement with radio, however, is that of non-use and exclusion. Organisations such as the BDA, NID and deaf journals were universally dismissive of the cultural forum. They did not explore whether individuals' engagement with it could raise publicity, as the public connection between blind people and radio had. This dismissal explains why the NID, and other organisations, focused so heavily on cinema and television. The visual aspect of those forums offered more straightforward access to deaf and hard of hearing people, and the opportunity to connect them with deafness in the public mind. A connection that was not possible with a wholly auditory cultural forum. Despite this, however, the differences of opinion that were present but not highlighted within the deaf community about radio would become increasingly apparent as the twentieth century progressed, and powerful actors within the community would have less ability to shape the narrative around individuals' engagement with them.

3.1. Communication in deaf and hard of hearing communities

In their 1932-33 Annual Report, the officials of the Executive Committee of the NID wrote:

> Telephony and wireless have revolutionised life. Both are now indispensable to business and social happiness. In a moment, they overcome distance and unite friends separated by oceans and continents. It is, therefore, a greater misfortune to be deaf to-day than ever before […] The losses of the closed ear grow greater as the discoveries of acoustic science proceed.[315]

It is evident that for some deaf and hard of hearing people, emerging sound technologies were cutting them off from new areas of life. As this chapter and work by Coreen McGuire demonstrate, there were sections of the deaf community that found innovative ways to use the technologies mentioned above.[316] However, the uptake in their use also drew new social lines of who could and could not participate, as well as divides in the deaf community over who could, or wanted, to use them. This poses the question of what alternatives some deaf and hard of hearing people found as they negotiated new developments. Within my archival

[315] London, The British Library (BL), National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1932-33*, 1933, p. 26.
[316] Coreen McGuire, 'Inventing Amplified Telephony: The Co-Creation of Aural Technology and Disability', in *Rethinking Modern Prosthesis in Anglo-American Commodity Cultures, 1820-1939*, ed. by Claire L Jones (Manchester, Michigan: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 70-90 (pp. 70-90).

research, deaf people were increasingly seeking spaces solely tailored to them to communicate with other deaf and hard of hearing people. I argue that the creation and continuation of deaf and hard of hearing spaces were partially in response to new areas of exclusion, such as from radio, emerging.

Historians Esme Cleall and Neil Pemberton have respectively explored the deaf community in nineteenth-century Britain, as deaf people met through institutions, schools, churches, and missionaries created explicitly for them and fostered a growing sense of community.[317] The creation of spaces for deaf and hard of hearing people to communicate and connect increased in the twentieth century. In his work, Martin Atherton explores the leisure activities of deaf clubs in Britain from 1945 onwards.[318] He describes them as 'vital to the existence and continuation of the British deaf community and explores what he describes as 'key questions' around deaf clubs: their location, how many were there, who ran them and what took place at them.[319] What he does not explore in-depth, however, is how and why the clubs became so popular in the twentieth century. I argue that it is not coincidental that at a time when audio technologies were increasingly being taken up by hearing members of British society and enabling new modes of communication and entertainment, deaf and hard of hearing people felt increasingly cut off and in need of alternatives.

In 1939, the NID published a summary of the activities of the Central Club for the Deafened, writing that membership had increased to the point that they were no longer advertising due to lack of space.[320] Within the same summary, officials of the NID claimed that the 'greatest achievement' of the club was that it encouraged deaf people to 'act for themselves', and that so-called 'open evenings', where deaf people could do whatever they chose, were hugely popular.[321] The NID claimed that this 'proves how members are regaining confidence in their ability to overcome their handicap.'[322] This indicates that not only was the

[317] Esme Cleall, *Colonising Disability: otherness and impairment across Britain and its empire, c. 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 148-179.
Neil Pemberton, 'Deafness and Holiness: Home Missions, Deaf Congregations, and Natural Language 1860-1890', *Victorian Review*, 35 (2009), 65-82 (pp. 65-82).
[318] Martin Atherton, *Deafness, Community and Culture in Britain: Leisure and Cohesion*, 1945-1955 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).
[319] Ibid., p. 1.
[320] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1938-39*, 1939, p. 19.
[321] Ibid.
[322] Ibid.

desire to be part of a deaf club increasing but also that they were spaces where independence and engagement were encouraged amongst deaf people.

Officials at the NID also paid close attention to the successful Leagues of the Hard of Hearing in the United States. In 1936, the Executive Committee commented on the popularity of such leagues, commenting that there were 'very few such organisations in this country.'[323] They wrote that the NID was happy to advise anyone trying to set up a group in Britain as they helped alleviate what they labelled deaf people's 'morbid sense of isolation' and desire for 'companionship'.[324] The motivation to form hard of hearing clubs was apparent, as in 1925, very few existed; however, by 1945, the NID reported that leagues had been established in eight counties, with thirteen clubs nationwide.[325]

During the Second World War, the Executive Committee again offered their support, writing in the NID annual report:

> The Institute will welcome and support all efforts to provide the hard of hearing with leagues and clubs where they can foregather for social recreation, lipreading instruction and practice and other functions which their deafness prevents them from enjoying with their hearing fellows.[326]

Their support for hard of hearing organisations demonstrated that the NID was focused on various types and degrees of deafness, placing importance on connecting those in similar situations. The above quote also clarifies that they considered it essential for deaf and hard of hearing people to have separate, unique places to engage in activities, such as lipreading, unique to the community. I argue that one of the 'functions' they consider hard of hearing people isolated from included sound-based activities such as listening to wireless, further justifying the creation of organisations to bring deaf and hard of hearing people into contact with each other.

As well as physically congregating, print remained a dominant form of communication for deaf people from 1925-1945. As radio broadcasts and the telephone became a mainstay for news and socialisation, deaf publications provided a space for those who struggled to engage with the technology. Gooday and Sayer have explored how deaf

---

[323] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1935-36*, 1936, p. 15.
[324] Ibid.
[325] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1944-45*, 1945, p. 18.
[326] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1943-44*, 1944, p. 23.

journals were created and run in Britain and how they advised deaf people about new technology.[327] They also argue that such journals catered to a diverse range of people across the deaf community.[328] The most evident form of information sharing within the deaf community nationally were the back pages of publications such as *BDT* or the *Deaf Quarterly News* (henceforth *DQN*). Missions for deaf people could send summaries of their activities and news, which would be printed in each edition.[329] As more missions and clubs were established, these pages increased in size. New elements were added, for example, sports columns and social news.[330] This served to both promote clubs and institutions and create a feeling of community and connection in a visual, non-audio format.

Internationally, news from other countries was sporadically reported on in both publications. In 1929, however, the editor of the *BDT* introduced so-called 'Overseas Pages', in which brief news stories relating to deafness were printed.[331] The countries reported on tended to be former or current British colonies, such as Australia, Canada, India and America.[332] As the feature expanded over the era, more European countries appeared on the pages. The creation of these pages indicates that there were those in the deaf community who sought to recreate the immediacy of news transmitted via telephone or wireless, using the traditional medium of print.

Another feature of deaf publications that allowed deaf and hard of hearing people to communicate with each other across geographical boundaries – boundaries that were decreasing for hearing people thanks to technology – were the letters pages. Two letters published in the 'Our Post Bag' pages of the *BDT* in 1928 and 1941 demonstrate how this feature could function for deaf people.[333]

---

[327] Graeme Gooday and Karen Sayer, *Managing the Experience of Hearing Loss in Britain, 1830-1930* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 101-106.
[328] Ibid.
[329] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP.1108.BCD, 'Mission News', *The British Deaf Times* 22.255-56 (March-April 1925), p. 44.
BL, Deaf Quarterly News, P.P.1108.e., 'News', *Deaf Quarterly News* 80 (January-February-March 1925), p. 14.
[330] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP.1108.BCD, 'Sports Column', *The British Deaf Times* 24.279-80 (March-April 1927), p. 42.
[331] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP.1108.BCD, 'Deaf Across the Seas', *The British Deaf Times* 26.303-4 (March-April 1929), p. 33.
BL, The British Deaf Times, PP.1108.BCD, 'Overseas Page', *The British Deaf Times* 29.339-40 (March-April 1932), p. 31.
[332] Ibid.
[333] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP.1108.BCD, 'Our Post Bag – Letter: Pen Friends', *The British Deaf Times* 25.297-8 (September-October 1928), p. 112.
BL, The British Deaf Time, PP. 1108.BCD, 'Our Post Bag – Letter: Advice to the War Deafened', *The British Deaf Times* 38.447-8 (March-April 1941), p. 24.

In the September-October 1928 edition of *BDT*, a man using the pseudonym 'Isolated' had his letter published.[334] In it, he revealed that he was 22 years old and had lost his hearing in infancy before becoming completely deaf aged fourteen.[335] On living in the countryside, he wrote, 'There are no deaf people within ten miles with whom I can associate. I live and work amongst hearing people, who seem to know nothing of the Deaf and Dumb.'[336] He taught the sign finger alphabet to his hearing friends, 'who are thus able to talk to me by this means if I fail to lipread correctly.'[337] He wrote that his hearing friends 'are kind to me, yet there is a grim and subtle barrier between us, of which I am only too conscious.'[338] He continues to express that he felt isolated and struggled to form relationships, asking for a penfriend to help his situation.[339] This letter demonstrates that some used deaf print publications as a mediatory to connect with others in the deaf community, suggesting yet another print medium, letters, as an accessible form of communication.

The letter pages were also used by deaf and hard of hearing people to advise others in a similar situation. In 1941, the letter of J. Flynn, superintendent of the St Helens District Deaf and Dumb Institute, was printed in the *BDT*.[340] He wrote, 'I am one of the 35,000 deafened in the Great War.'[341] He lamented the lack of support he had received following the war, claiming that the government 'turned me loose to sink or swim' after giving him his pension.[342] Flynn encouraged those deafened in the Second World War, which was taking place at the time of writing, to make contact with other deaf people, writing:

> As one who has "been through the mill" I would strongly advise any man deafened in this war to get in touch with the deaf and dumb in his district. In that way he will be mixing with people who will treat him with a degree of understanding that he, in his changed circumstances, cannot hope to get from "hearing" people.[343]

In his letter, Flynn demonstrates the use of letter pages as a means of giving advice and drawing together the deaf community for those born deaf and the recently deafened.

---

[334] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP.1108.BCD, 'Our Post Bag – Letter: Pen Friends', *The British Deaf Times* 25.297-8 (September-October 1928), p. 112.
[335] Ibid.
[336] Ibid.
[337] Ibid.
[338] Ibid.
[339] Ibid.
[340] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP. 1108.BCD, 'Our Post Bag – Letter: Advice to the War Deafened', *The British Deaf Times* 38.447-8 (March-April 1941), p. 24.
[341] Ibid.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Ibid.

Therefore, the continued use of print communication, in particular deaf publications, presented an alternative to sound-based communication for deaf and hard of hearing people. Deaf and hard of hearing people used existing and newly developed alternatives to sound communication, including radio.

It is evident within the archival sources that where engagement with audio technologies was not possible or desired, the British deaf community found alternative means of communication and community formation. As will be explored in the next section of this chapter, new audio technologies posed new questions, benefits, and challenges to deaf and hard of hearing people. Consequently, it is essential to remember the non-technological elements within the deaf community during this era and how they also shaped ideas of deafness and identity. As new auditory technologies came into their lives, deaf and hard of hearing people had outlets to discuss engagement, exclusion, and deaf culture. They were also arenas in which prominent community members could shape opinions on cultural forums such as radio, whether those opinions were in favour or against engagement.

3.2. Negotiating deafness and new audio technology

As established in the previous section, many deaf and hard of hearing people sought non-technological means to communicate and find entertainment in the twentieth century. New audio technologies were, however, on the radar of deaf publications and organisations. Two key topics that appeared in the NID Annual Reports, *British Deaf Times* and *Deaf Quarterly News* were hearing aids and, during the years of the Second World War, air raid sirens. The frequent appearance of these two topics in my archival work demonstrated where audio technologies were appearing in the lives of deaf and hard of hearing people and why issues surrounding radio were not a priority during these years.

The history of hearing aids, in particular the exploitation of deaf and hard of hearing people by predatory advertisers, has been documented in recent literature. Gooday and Sayer delve deeply into the subject, while Jaipreet Virdi mentions it within the context of the United States.[344] Therefore, I will give a brief overview of the subject as it appears within the primary material I have explored, which makes little mention of wireless but gives room for

[344] Gooday and Sayer, p. 65.
Jaipreet Virdi, *Hearing Happiness: Deafness Cures in History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), p. 125.

the discussion of hearing aids. An obvious omission in this work is the topic of the telephone – this has been comprehensively covered in work by Coreen McGuire.[345]

The NID focused on issues around hearing aids, especially the commerce surrounding them, in the years 1925-1945. In stark contrast to the organisation's sparse documentation on the radio, hearing aids appear as a topic throughout their annual reports. The NID had been reconstituted out of an older organisation – the National Bureau for Promoting the General Welfare of the Deaf – in 1925.[346] From the outset, hearing aids were a prominent issue. In their 1925 Annual Report, the NID wrote their 'Articles of Constitution'.[347] Under 'objects' was the general statement: 'The Prevention of Deafness, and the promotion of the general welfare of the Deaf in the United Kingdom.'[348] This object was then broken down into four subsections, number three of which was to 'conduct investigations of research into any matter connected with the welfare of the Deaf and publish information on this subject.'[349] As evident in the statement on wireless and the correspondence at the beginning of this chapter, the NID fulfilled this objective regarding wireless. Far more focus, however, was on hearing aids.

In 1926, a subsection of the organisation's Report of the Executive Committee to the Council read 'Aids to Hearing'.[350] In it, the Executive Committee reported on their 'success' in 'their effort to protect the deafened against disappointment and loss resulting from the purchase of unsuitable aids to hearing.'[351] The desire to 'protect' deaf and hard of hearing people from predatory advertisers and salespeople pushing devices that were of little use to them is as set out by Gooday and Sayer and in the introduction to this thesis.[352] The NID were happy to report that more deaf and hard of hearing people were consulting them before purchasing devices, and following the guidance, the institute published on the matter. This guidance consisted of approved companies from which to buy hearing aids.[353] These companies were only approved after meeting certain conditions, which included telling the client upfront if their products would be of little use to them, offering refunds up to three

[345] McGuire, 'Inventing Amplified Telephony', pp. 70-90.
[346] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1925*, 1925, p. 4.
[347] Ibid., p. 16.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid.
[350] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1926*, 1926, p. 26.
[351] Ibid.
[352] Gooday and Sayer, p. 65.
[353] McGuire, *Measuring Difference, Numbering Normal*, pp. 119-124.

weeks after purchase, and not consulting with clients in their own homes.[354] The organisation's goal was to prevent deaf and hard of hearing people from being 'exploited under the guise of sympathy.'[355] In 1935, they promoted their guidance in leaflets titled 'The Choice of a Hearing Aid' and 'The Exploitation of the Deaf in the Sale of a Hearing Aid'.[356]

It is evident, therefore, that substantial time, effort, and money was being directed towards issues surrounding hearing aids by officials within the NID. The focus was to ensure that the technology and the infrastructure surrounding it enabled those for whom it was suitable and those who could not benefit from hearing aids were protected. During the years of the Second World War, 1939-1945, NID officials continued to prioritise hearing aids as an area requiring attention.[357] The war made it difficult for deaf and hard of hearing people to purchase hearing aids and, crucially, the batteries needed to power them.[358] Here, the institute intervened at a higher level than before, acting as a mediator between the Ministry of Health, the Hearing Aid Manufacturers Association, and the Surgical Instrument Manufacturers Association.[359] They also consulted with MP Sir Francis Freemantle on petitioning the government to end the purchase tax on hearing aids and batteries. Hearing aid appliances were successfully exempt; however, the batteries were not.[360] Further engagement with the government included the President of the NID, Lord Montrose, interviewing the Minister of Health about creating an inexpensively produced, standardised hearing aid and battery.[361] Hearing Aids also feature in a report published by the NID's Post War Policy Committee: article eleven of sixteen under 'Needs of the Deaf' read '[the] provision of such mechanical or electrical hearing appliances as will tend to reduce the consequences of the defect.'[362]

The above signals that the NID was working towards broader, state-supported access to hearing aids and batteries for deaf and hard of hearing people and that they were willing to – unlike in the case of wireless – exert considerable effort on the matter. Post-war, they would continue to focus on the NHS-provided Medresco hearing aid, waiting lists and

---

[354] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1926*, 1926, p. 27.
[355] Ibid.
[356] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1935-36*, 1936, p. 15.
[357] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1940-42*, 1942, p. 8.
[358] Ibid., p.9.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Ibid., p. 11.
[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid., p. 16.

access.[363] Electronic hearing aids enabled some deaf and hard of hearing people to engage with their sonic environment in ways not previously possible. However, they also alienated those who could or did not want to use them. Whilst handling the challenges and contested nature of developments in hearing aid technology and access, it is unsurprising that organisations such as the NID and deaf publications were less inclined to focus time and resources on issues surrounding radio.

Alongside hearing aids, a critical issue that arose for deaf and hard of hearing people during the Second World War was air raid sirens. These again demonstrated the discrimination deaf and hard of hearing people faced as new systems that relied on sound were created. Rather than the NID, it was journalists writing for *The British Deaf Times* (henceforth *BDT*) who highlighted the issue of air raid protocols for deaf and hard of hearing people. Air Raid Precautions, known as ARP, were put in place in Britain due to heavy bombing during the Second World War.[364] These precautions included audio warning signals and alarms, which some deaf and hard of hearing people would have struggled to hear. In the spring of 1939, *BDT* editor James Perkins wrote in his column 'Chat With Our Readers' that in 'certain districts', those in charge of ARP who were 'responsible' had made a note of where deaf people lived in their area and assessed their needs.[365] However, he argued that overall much improvement was needed to ensure the safety of deaf people during air raids.[366] An example of officials taking precautions for deaf people was reported in 1940. In Egham, Surrey, an ARP officer was appointed especially for the deaf people in the area, a Mrs Whipps.[367] In Sheffield, the superintendent of the Sheffield Institute for the Deaf took it upon himself to ensure that deaf people in his area were safe, consulting with ARP officials and a Chief Constable to ensure that deaf households were noted.[368]

Before the outbreak of war, there had been articles on alarm systems in *BDT*; however, air raids pulled the lack of accessible technology for deaf people into sharper

[363] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1947*, 1947, pp. 4-5.
[364] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP. 1108.BCD, 'Chat With Our Readers', *The British Deaf Times* 36.423-24 (March-April 1939), p. 37.
[365] Ibid.
[366] Ibid.
[367] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP. 1108.BCD, 'Gleanings from Far and Near', *The British Deaf Times* 37.437-38 (May-June 1940), p. 52.
[368] Sheffield, The Sheffield Local Studies Library, The Sheffield Association in Aid of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Annual Reports 362.4 S, *The Sheffield Association in Aid of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Annual Report 1939*, 1939, p. 5.

focus.[369] In the summer of 1939, an article in *BDT* was titled 'Scheme to Warn Deaf of Night Air Raid' and detailed a potential plan to fit devices that would connect to the doorbells of deaf households and could be placed in the beds of those who could not hear audio alarms. The theory was that ARP officials could push the doorbells, and small electric shocks would wake deaf people in bed.[370] How safe or unpleasant this would be for those occupants was not commented on.

Throughout this thesis, the issue of deaf and hard of hearing people receiving less state and public sympathy than people with other disabilities, particularly blind people, is a frequent theme. This is evident regarding ARP, as reported in the *BDT*. A regular column titled 'Gleanings from Far and Near' was a regular feature in the publication during the Second World War, written by someone under the pseudonym 'The Gleaner'. In early 1940 they lamented that:

> We have noted that in Air Raid Proposal forms ample provision seems to be given to the loss of limb and sight, but none whatever to the loss of hearing. We have drawn the attention of the NID and others qualified to deal with these most important matters.[371]

This quote demonstrates the danger deaf and hard of hearing people faced, as many failed to acknowledge that audio warning systems were not accessible to all. The publication later thanked the magazine *ARP News* for providing information on what deaf people could do to ensure their safety. A sign of progress, it also shows that the responsibility was on deaf people and the organisations around them to tackle the issue.[372] The issue of ARP warning systems for deaf people demonstrates the impact of new sound technologies during the era. They also present a more pressing issue for deaf people, their organisations, and publications than wireless. This explains why wireless was rarely written about in NID reports and major deaf publications.

The two examples explored, hearing aids and ARP, highlight some of the developments in audio technologies faced by deaf and hard of hearing people and the organisations around them in the years 1925-1945. For some, engagement with new assistive

---

[369] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP. 1108.BCD, 'Chat With Our Readers', *The British Deaf Times* 36.423-24 (March-April 1939), p. 37.
[370] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP. 1108.BCD, 'Scheme to Warn Deaf of Night Air Raid', *The British Deaf Times* 36.427-28 (July-August 1939), p. 90
[371] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP. 1108.BCD, 'Gleanings from Far and Near', *The British Deaf Times* 37.433-34 (January-February 1940), p. 3.
[372] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP. 1108.BCD, 'Gleanings from Far and Near', *The British Deaf Times* 37.437-38 (May-June 1940), p. 54.

technology eased significant struggles. However, for others, it side-lined them further and created new thresholds within the deaf community, with some able to engage whilst others either were not or resisted it. The increased use of electronic alarms to signal danger in the Second World War also demonstrates the lack of consideration given to those who were deaf or hard of hearing and how organisations and publications had to publicise safety issues. Unsurprisingly, deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with radio was not regarded as a pressing issue beyond dismissing its use for individuals within the community. However, as will be explored in the remainder of this chapter, the discussion of radio, its limits and uses, did exist in a limited way that failed to complicate the dominant twentieth-century narrative of radio as useless to most deaf and hard of hearing people. The debates I have uncovered demonstrate that the relationship between deafness and cultural forums was complex and deeply contested.

3.3. The contested nature of radio

3.3i. The stance of the NID

In their Annual Report of the Executive Committee for the year 1926, the National Institute for the Deaf (henceforth NID) set out their stance on the topic.[373] Under the heading 'Wireless and the Deaf', the Committee warns that overly optimistic reports on the use of wireless for deaf people 'lead only to disappointment and add to the burden of the affliction.'[374] The institute's official statement on the matter read:

> Wireless is of no use to the deaf-mute. In cases of hardness of hearing, those who hear through the ordinary telephone will hear wireless through its earphones; and those who have difficulty with speech, heard through the air, will have the same difficulty with the loudspeaker.[375]

They acknowledge that 'a percentage' of people who are hard of hearing may be able to enjoy speech and musical broadcasts, but that press reports on the topic were misleading through 'sensational promises.'[376]

[373] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1926*, 1926, p. 15.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid.

A strong supporter of this message within the NID was Arthur John Story, the institute's secretary between 1925 to 1938.[377] In late 1926, *The Times* published a series of letters discussing the possible uses of wireless by deaf people, in which Story, alongside A J Wilson – President of the National Deaf Club – intervened as an authority on deaf matters.

On the 17th of November 1926, a letter from Mr Alfred North of South Devon was published in *The Times*. He was writing on the Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill mentioned in the previous chapter.[378] He suggested that an amendment be made to include 'deaf mutes' as he purported that 'many, if not most, of the so-called "deaf and dumb" can (through the medium of earphones) enjoy what is broadcast by "wireless" in the same manner as their more normal fellow-creatures.'[379] He ended his letter by commenting that blind people received greater sympathy than deaf people and that they also deserved assistance.[380]

In response to North's letter, A. J. Wilson, the President of the National Deaf Club, thanked North for acknowledging the greater sympathy blind people received but disagreed with his claims that most 'deaf mutes' could use wireless. He wrote that it was not of the 'slightest benefit' and that 'all wireless can do is to bring sounds from a distance. It cannot make the deaf hear.'[381] A few days later, another letter from Arthur John Story of the NID was printed. He wrote that 'after much investigation, and to prevent the raising of false hopes and consequent disappointment in the born-deaf, my committee have found it necessary to circulate the following report.' He then reiterated the statement printed in the 1926 Annual Report of the Executive Committee: that whilst some hard of hearing people may be able to enjoy wireless, profoundly deaf people and especially those deaf from birth would not be able to hear broadcasts.[382]

Despite Story's assumed authority as the secretary of the NID, two more correspondents wrote in, arguing that they were deaf yet could hear wireless broadcasts. One of these was a barrister, Sir Frank Fox, whose injuries in the First World War had included

---

[377] H Dominic W Stiles, 'A.J. Story, Teacher of the Deaf and first secretary of the National Institute for the Deaf', *UCL Ear Institute & Action On Hearing Loss Libraries* <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/library-rnid/2012/03/16/teacher-of-the-deaf-and-first-secretary-of-the-national-institute-for-the-deaf/> [accessed 5 December 2022].
[378] The Times Digital Archive (TDA), 'Wireless for Deaf Mutes' *The Times* Issue 44431 (17 November 1926), p. 10.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Ibid.
[381] TDA, 'Wireless for Deaf Mutes' *The Times*, Issue 44433 (19 November 1926), p. 10.
[382]TDA, 'Wireless for the Deaf' *The Times*, Issue 44438 (25 November 1926), p. 19.

severe hearing loss.[383] He accused Wilson and Story of 'going too far' in dismissing radio and that he had

> Consulted several specialists (Ministry of Pensions and a private friend in England, a renowned aurist in Austria). From two of these I had specific advice that listening to wireless through headphones would be helpful: and have found it so.[384]

He argued that listening to wireless helped to prevent the aural nerve from 'atrophying' by vibrating it This was not considered to be a cause of deafness today or during the era.[385] Fox concluded that *The Times* would 'do a service to the many who are deaf' if they 'obtained an authoritative account from an aural surgeon' and was confident they would confirm his statements.[386] Once again, Story replied. He critiqued Fox's lack of understanding of different categories of deafness and that those born deaf would struggle with wireless far more than those with acquired deafness, such as Fox.[387] He disputes that the NID was issuing a blanket dismissal of wireless for deaf people, but on Fox's claims that wireless could be curative, wrote that 'Hundreds of experiments with the telephone and wireless have failed to produce, so far as we know, a single case' in which someone who was deaf from birth had benefitted.[388] He also informed Fox, and *The Times* readership, that the NID had as Chair of its Medical Committee Dr James Kerr Love, the world-renowned otologist, and that it had been Kerr Love who had provided the statement that wireless was of little use to deaf people.[389] Story finished his letter by warning deaf people not to get their hopes up and to consult an otologist before buying a wireless set.[390] There appears to have been no response from Fox.

This interaction demonstrates how the NID presented radio in the early twentieth century as outside of the deaf community and as a new avenue for offering false hope to deaf people. Members of the NID dismissed deaf people's engagement with the cultural forum, and in its discussion of the topic put forward ideas of deaf people as excluded and vulnerable and radio as an exclusionary medium for use amongst those with enough hearing for it. The interaction above indicates that there were people who considered themselves part of the deaf

---

[383] TDA, 'The Deaf and Wireless' *The Times*, Issue 44443 (1 December 1926), p. 7.
[384] Ibid.
[385] Concluded from a search of The Lancet and British Medical Journal – prominent medical journals covering the era of this thesis and still in circulation.
[386] Ibid.
[387] TDA, 'Wireless and the Deaf' *The Times*, Issue 44448 (7 December 1926), p. 23.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid.
[390] Ibid.

community who desired to engage with radio, a layer of nuance the NID appeared reluctant to handle comprehensively.

3.3ii. Utilising wireless broadcasts

Whilst there was little enthusiasm within deaf organisations and publications for the use of radio by deaf people, developments with the technology were occasionally being observed and reported on. Additionally, officials within organisations such as the NID realised the potential of wireless broadcasts to inform hearing audiences about matters that affected deaf people and appeal for funds. Whilst radio was considered not for use by deaf people; the NID was considering how it could be used by hearing people to promote the welfare of deaf people and raise awareness of deafness as a cause worthy of public attention.

The NID rarely reported on these appeals until after 1945. However, newspaper clippings on charity appeals made on behalf of deaf charities were collated in scrapbooks found in their archive. Various clippings reported on appeals being made on regional radio stations. These were made by local charity officials, such as the President of the Local Society for Promoting the Welfare of the Deaf and Dumb of Southampton on the regional wavelength in August of 1939.[391] In Warwickshire, a local MP, Captain W. F. Strickland, made an appeal in 1934, whilst the Mayoress of Cardiff broadcast on regional radio in Cardiff.

Events involving and on behalf of deaf people were also given radio time. In October 1938, the BBC broadcast a church service held for the Swansea and Central Wales Mission to the Adult Deaf and Dumb.[392] The service was usually signed for the deaf congregation; however, speech was used on this occasion, with the superintendent of the mission interpreting through sign language. A choir was also used for the broadcast.[393] The article reported, 'The first part of the service will be exactly as broadcast, so that the adult deaf and dumb may see what takes place on these occasions, even though they may not be able to hear it.'[394] Whilst superficially an act of charity and a valuable tool for awareness, this can also be

[391] London, Action on Hearing Loss Library (AOHL), RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Wireless Appeal for Deaf and Dumb', 24th October 1939.
Relocated to: London, UCL Special Collections, RNID Scrapbooks, RNID/3/20/19-22, RNID/3/20/30-3, RNID/3/30/41, RNID/3/20/44.
[392] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Radio Broadcast from Deaf and Dumb Church', 6th November 1938.
[393] Ibid.
[394] Ibid.

analysed as discriminatory against deaf people. Elements were added to the service that required hearing, and some participants could not listen to the broadcast itself.

Similarly, the music from a dance held in aid of a Torquay deaf charity was broadcast in 1939.[395] In 1937, Sydney Howard, a Yorkshire comedian, broadcast a national appeal for the Yorkshire Institute of the Deaf and Dumb on the BBC's long-running segment *Week's Good Cause*. Therefore, celebrities and prominent local officials were used by deaf charities and organisations to raise awareness via the radio. The NID made a national broadcast appeal in 1946, suggesting that the organisation was becoming aware of the effectiveness of radio.[396]

There is also evidence, mainly in *BDT*, that those who could engage with wireless broadcasts were keen to report back to deaf and hard of hearing people relevant occurrences in print. An area of concern was the trope of deaf characters being used for comedic effect, making light of hearing impairment.[397] In 1925, a contributor to *BDT* published only under the initials R.A.P. wrote on deafness being used not for comedy but in literature. They quoted Mr E. E. Calkins, who had commented in the *Atlantic Monthly* that 'All literature is against us. The hero is never Deaf. The Deaf man furnishes only comedy.'[398] R.A.P., rather than criticising the use of deaf characters in this way, encouraged deaf people themselves to challenge stereotypes by seeking further education.[399] Their article does, however, offer context as to why concerns about deaf characters in wireless plays existed. In the May-June 1934 column 'Gleanings from Far and Near', the author 'The Gleaner' wrote that:

> We note that the subject of the deaf is well to the fore in BBC affairs, for there was recently broadcast a new radio opera at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London, entitled "The Devil Takes Her"; yet another version of that well-worn theme of "The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife"[400]

This comment appears to criticise the use of deaf characters in plays where they perpetuate negative stereotypes. It is also of interest that The Gleaner comments on where deaf matters stand in BBC affairs. The BBC played a significant role in the Wireless for the Blind Fund

---

[395] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Deaf and Dumb Society – Music Broadcast from Dance at Torquay', 7th February 1939.
[396] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1945-46*, 1946, p. 14.
[397] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP. 1108.BCD, 'The Comedy (?) of Deafness', *The British Deaf Times* 22.259-60 (July-August 1925), p. 77.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Ibid.
[400] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP. 1108.BCD, 'Gleanings From Far and Near', *The British Deaf Times* 31.365-6, (May-June 1934), p. 54.

but appeared to have had less time and attention for deaf causes. As this thesis will explore there was a shift in this stance later in the century.

For broadcasts to be reported in deaf publications, someone who could hear wireless must have reported on it and shared the information. This is a further example of how deaf and hard of hearing people navigated new sounds, negotiating between 'hearing' and 'deaf' society. This negotiation was also apparent within NID materials, as a page in the 1928 Annual Report revealed. The page is a NID advert, on which the slogan 'Have you ever thought what deafness would rule out of your life?' is written over a drawing of an ear. Underneath sound-based activities that deaf people were unable to engage with are listed.[401] This included lectures, speeches, music and wireless.[402] The inclusion of wireless reveals that whilst the NID did not think wireless was of use to deaf people, the inability for them to use it was a noteworthy loss that would gain public sympathy.

3.3iii. Deafness and radio in 'The Age of Noise'

A significant development during 1939-1945 was the use of deaf people as a symbol in arguments against noise, including wireless. In examining sound in twentieth-century Britain, historian James Mansell has written about concerns arising around noise pollution and new sonic environments.[403] He writes of what has been coined the 'Age of Noise' and the social impact of new soundscapes. Hearing, and so deafness, was of interest as a way of reporting on the new sounds that were becoming incorporated into the everyday lives of British people.

Whilst some used radio as an example of yet another area of life deaf people had been shut off, some press reports painted hearing impairment as an advantage. In 1938 the *Birmingham Daily Mail* published an article titled 'Advantages of Being Deaf – Freedom From Life's Nuisances'.[404] The author wrote that 'amongst their friends and acquaintances, most people can find at least one who is "hard of hearing," and they feel so sorry for those sufferers – "They miss such a lot, poor things!" […] But just consider all the unpleasant

[401] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1928*, 1928, unnumbered page - backmatter.
[402] Ibid.
[403] James G Mansell, *The Age of Noise in Britain, Hearing Modernity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press2017), p. 1.
[404] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 'Advantages of Being Deaf – Freedom From Many of Life's Nuisances', 19th January 1938.

things they are dodging into the bargain!'[405] They listed how hearing impairment could result in better nights' sleep as noise disturbances did not bother hard of hearing people and the benefits of less noise on the nervous system.[406]

A similar article published the following year claimed that deaf people were less likely to be distracted by noise in industrial settings and less prone to accidents.[407] It went on to state that 'There are compensations in all things. I sometimes feel that people who cannot hear have something to be thankful for if only they knew it. They have escaped being tortured by jazz or exasperated by the crooner.'[408] In Leeds, the Mayoress in 1938, Mrs P. T. Leigh put forward similar sentiments at the Leeds Institute for the Deaf: 'You are lucky to miss some of the new music […] It is awful. I often feel how pleasant it would be if I could not hear some of these people who think they can sing, but can't.'[409]

The articles are from the perspective of hearing people. However, in 1939 there were multiple articles in the press on Mrs Sarah Brown of Southwold.[410] Mrs Brown had been deaf since 1916 and 'bitterly regretted that she could not hear wireless programmes.'[411] The articles report that her hearing was unexpectedly restored but give little detail about the circumstances of this. However, they state that on hearing a 'crooner' on the wireless, she demanded that her family 'put off that awful row' and stated, 'I often wished I could have the wireless, but now I wish I hadn't.'[412] A separate article reported her saying, 'I'd sooner be deaf again and stay deaf than to have to sit and listen to a crooner.'[413] These articles demonstrate a positive attitude towards deafness later put forward by Deaf activists. However, the agenda of the journalists and papers publishing these articles must also be considered. I argue that these parties used deafness in relation to wireless as a social commentary on a symbol of modernity – radio and contemporary music. Therefore, it is an example of how radio was politicised, not just in terms of disability but broader social causes

---

[405] Ibid.
[406] Ibid.
[407] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Deaf and Dumb in Industry "Less Liable to Accident", Escape From Crooners and Jazz', 16th April 1939.
[408] Ibid.
[409] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Yorkshire Evening News*, 'A Civic Visit', 5th November 1938.
[410] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'The Moral', 6th January 1939.
AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Deaf Woman's Ignorance Was Bliss – She Knows That Now – Too Late', 5th January 1939.
AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *John Bull*, Title Unclear, 21st January 1939.
[411]AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'The Moral', 6th January 1939.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Ibid.

as well. It is notable, however, that these examples were found in clippings gathered in scrapbooks by someone within the NID.

While deaf people's non-use of wireless was used as a symbolic allegory by hearing people, James Perkins, editor of *BDT*, used the language of broadcasting when addressing deaf people. In 1932, he included a subsection in his regular column entitled 'Do You Broadcast?'[414] In it, he wrote that 'In a sense we are all broadcasters' due to both the unconscious and conscious ways people share information with those around them. He encouraged readers to share positive and helpful things with each other, to 'help men to find it easier to do right and harder to do wrong.'[415] I argue that the use of the language of broadcasting demonstrates awareness of developments in wireless and its popularity, as well as being an attempt to include deaf people by suggesting that they engage with 'broadcasting'.

There was awareness of both issues and possibilities surrounding deaf people and wireless by both deaf organisations, deaf publications, and mainstream newspapers in 1925-1945. Whilst not widely reported on and largely not commented on by organisations such as the NID, the popularisation of wireless raised new areas of thought, negotiation, exclusion, and utility for deaf people.

3.3iv. Individuals using radio

Previously in this chapter, I have focused on deaf and hard of hearing people not using radio, as well as 'wireless for the deaf' being dismissed as an idea by the NID. It is worthwhile to note, however, that primary materials revealed that some deaf and hard of hearing people were engaging with the technology. Most of these sources are mainstream newspapers and magazines, in which the NID accused the press of exaggerating claims regarding the use of wireless by deaf people.[416] For example, in 1930, an article on the debates surrounding broadcasting live orchestra performances flippantly mentions that 'the deaf and blind […] are brought back [through wireless] in a wonderful way, and they are […]

[414] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP. 1108.BCD, 'Chat With Our Readers – Do You Broadcast?', *The British Deaf Times* 29.343-44, (July-August 1932), p. 85.
[415] Ibid.
[416] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1926*, 1926, p. 15.

overjoyed at this boon'.[417] The journalist does not expand on his reasoning or offer any caveats regarding deafness.

Whilst exaggeration or perhaps naivety on the subject is expected, it is worth exploring some of the testimonials given by deaf and hard of hearing people to the press. There is little acknowledgement within the articles of different types and degrees of deafness, which resulted in the NID's criticism. In this thesis, however, I wish to incorporate the experiences of hard of hearing people and those with profound deafness, though they may have all been categorised as 'deaf' at the time, hence the frustrations of the NID.

In April of 1926, a piece in *The Manchester Guardian* on a 101-year-old man, Mr George Hills, stated that 'though he is very deaf he enjoys the wireless programmes with the aid of a three-valve set.'[418] In 1933, Mrs L. H. of London wrote into *Answers* to contribute to an article titled 'My Favourite Broadcast.'[419] In a letter headed 'Her Only Experience', Mrs L. H. wrote:

> I have only heard one broadcast in my life […] I am stone deaf, therefore it is a miracle that I should have listened to a broadcast at all. I was visiting a relative who is a wireless demonstrator. The rest of the party were enjoying his fifty-guinea all-electric set. I, of course, felt rather out of things.[420]

Noticing that she was not included, the host gave her what she described as 'an improvised needle arrangement', which he connected to the set and then put in her mouth.[421] Mrs L. H. writes that:

> I did just so. Wonder of wonders, I heard Jazz music coming from Vienna! Never has my life contained a more thrilling moment.[422]

Mrs L. H.'s story reveals some of the options explored to allow some deaf people to listen to the radio, as well as the enjoyment some got from being able to access it. She also highlights the isolation some deaf people felt in social settings when they could not listen along to the wireless.

---

[417] ProQuest British Periodicals (PQBP), A. H. Fox., 'Music and Musicians: The BBC and its Critics', *The Observer* (12 October 1930), p. 14.
[418] PQBP, 'Centenarian and did not know it: Birthday Celebration a year late', *The Manchester Guardian* (3 April 1926), p. 19.
[419] PQBP, Mrs L. H., 'My Favourite Broadcast – Her Only Experience', *Answers* 91.15 (26 August 1933), p. 26.
[420] Ibid.
[421] Ibid.
[422] Ibid.

During this period, there was a limited call for 'Wireless for the Deaf' to accompany the popular and well-known Wireless for the Blind Fund. In 1935, *The Manchester Guardian* lamented that the lack of a similar fund for deaf people 'brings out once again the lack of real sympathy for this common affliction.'[423] The article highlighted that there were differing degrees of deafness, so 'many, therefore, could use wireless very well indeed, and thus something would be done to mitigate the severe cutting off from normal communication, which is deafness.'[424] It continued to say that 'even from the point of view of being informed only, wireless offers alleviations which are incalculable.'[425] What is ignored is that for some deaf people, wireless could not be heard at all.

A letter in *The Times* in January 1935, signed off simply as 'Audio', similarly asked why no Wireless for the Deaf Fund existed as:

> There could be no greater joy for a deaf person than to hear sometimes even if imperfectly. Many deaf people could hear broadcast programmes if they had suitable receivers with suitable telephones. Why not a Wireless for the Deaf Fund?[426]

Again, what was not mentioned was those who could not hear the wireless in any situation, what that meant to them or if they considered it positive or negative.

In 1935, a letter in *The Manchester Guardian* from 'a deaf listener' described the challenges of being unable to hear the wireless.[427] They describe themselves as 'exceedingly deaf' and that previously they had 'not been able to get much pleasure from the modern wireless set.' They wrote that:

> When urged to listen to anyone else's set it meant my having to go and sit directly in front of it, hold up my electrical aid to the loudspeaker (which prevented me from using my hands for sewing or any other occupation), and remain in chilly exile from the fireside circle until the item was over.[428]

Like Mrs L. H. in *Answers*, they reference the isolation felt by those who could not easily listen to the radio in communal settings. They then got a set of their own and some long-wired headphones 'so that I can sit anywhere or move about while listening, and my hands being free.'[429] This allowed them to not only hear broadcasts similarly to their hearing companions but also physically act like them whilst doing so as well. They state that 'my

[423] PQBP, 'Wireless and the Deaf: A Lack of Sympathy', *The Manchester Guardian* (2 March 1935), p. 10.
[424] Ibid.
[425] Ibid.
[426] TDA, 'Wireless for the Deaf – Letter to the Editor', *The Times*, Issue 46965 (18 January 1935), p. 13.
[427] PQBP, '"The Deaf Listener": Headphones', *The Manchester Guardian* (6 March 1935), p. 6.
[428] Ibid.
[429] Ibid.

pleasure in both hearing and working is thus doubled.'[430] They conclude that access to wireless could stop deaf people 'shrinking into ourselves' and that 'what gave me my first and chief enjoyment was being able to "hear the joke for myself" at last.'[431]I did not come across evidence, even anecdotal, of deaf and hard of hearing people using hearing aids to listen to radio in my archival research. However, the ability to listen to wireless was indicated in advertisements for hearing aids during the era. Hearing aid models such as the Ardente and Dime were promoted as allowing users to access radio, both in the text of adverts and in images.[432] This strongly suggests that there was a desire amongst the deaf and hard of hearing community to use assistive technology to access radio broadcasts, something recognised by manufacturers and advertisers.

The testimonies above offer anecdotal emotional insight into the effect of both being excluded from wireless and finding ways in which to access broadcasts. Only some of these methods relied on audio techniques, however. At the Sheffield Association in Aid of the Adult Deaf and Dumb, radio broadcasts are mentioned in their annual reports.[433] In the early 1930s, superintendent Colin Stephenson purchased a wireless set for the association. A sign language interpreter would stand by and interpret broadcasts for deaf association members to gather around and see.[434] It is recorded that this was 'appreciated' by members.[435] By doing this, an inaccessible audio medium was made visual and uniquely accessible to deaf sign language users.

What is evident is that wireless did have some use to a portion of deaf and hard of hearing people. Additionally, deaf people and those around them found ways to communicate using wireless as a visual medium, using sign language. This adds to the complexity of exploring the effect of wireless on deaf and hard of hearing people, as some could access it, some chose not to, and some were unable to engage.

3.4. Conclusion

[430] Ibid.
[431] Ibid.
[432] PQBP, 'Deafness: A Social Barrier Removed', *The Sphere* (14 June 1928), p. 51.
PQBP, 'Deafness: Xmas Without Hearing is Unthinkable', *The Sphere* (22 November 1926), p. *f.*
[433] Sheffield, The Sheffield Local Studies Library, The Sheffield Association in Aid of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Annual Reports 362.4 S, *The Sheffield Association in Aid of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Annual Report 1932*, 1932, p. 7.
[434] Ibid.
[435] Ibid.

It is difficult to quantify how many people who identified as deaf or hard of hearing were engaging with radio from 1925-1945. What is clear, however, is that members of the NID, along with the editorial teams of prominent deaf journals, believed radio was of little use to deaf and hard of hearing people. Whilst the cultural forum could be helpful for publicity, individuals' experiences with radio were given little attention. Despite this, within newspaper archives, there is evidence of deaf and hard of hearing people engaging with radio, demonstrating that it was a contested issue. Unlike later in the century, however, powerful actors within the British deaf community were able to maintain their narrative. Until now, the contested and complex nature of deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with the cultural forum has been ignored.

In the early-mid twentieth century, deaf and hard of hearing people increasingly sought spaces created explicitly for them, such as clubs and deaf journals. During this era, electronic cultural forums with audio elements, such as radio, were also taken up by members of the British public in increasing numbers. These spaces became important alternatives for deaf and hard of hearing people. However, as the century progressed, different ideas around deafness and technology emerged. As will be explored in the following chapters of this thesis, the decisions deaf and hard of hearing people within these spaces took became far more varied. As fractures within the deaf community became more apparent, the diverse ways in which deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with cultural forums became increasingly clear.

Other issues regarding sound technology and deafness took precedence in 1925-1945, namely hearing aids and ARP. The challenges these new developments presented to deaf and hard of hearing people helped to explain why radio was not a priority for members of the NID and the editorial teams of deaf journals. Unlike radio, these two developments were considered life changing and life threatening, respectively, so radio was considered a marginal issue. This highlights the attitudes that key members of the deaf community held and the power with which they could shape what was given precedence in discussions of deaf welfare. As will be seen in the following chapters on cinema and television, when members of organisations such as the NID considered access to a cultural forum worthy of attention, they repeatedly raised the topic in institutional records and publications, demonstrating that engagement with new cultural forums was mediated.

Radio is an example of a cultural forum for which the dominant narrative was shaped by officials within organisations such as the BDA, NID and deaf journals. However, radio use was contested. As the century progressed, these powerful actors would disagree on how or if members of the deaf community should engage with different cultural forums. It became increasingly difficult for them to present singular ideas around the cultural forums, or deafness itself, to mainstream media and the hearing public, demonstrating how the appearance of new audio forums in the lives of deaf and hard of hearing people highlighted new thresholds and divisions. Radio was constructed as a cultural medium that was not for use by deaf people but could be utilised on their behalf, for example, through broadcast charity appeals. Meanwhile, simultaneously, deaf and hard of hearing people were constructed to be victims of yet another area of exclusion, cut off from the benefits of radio. I have uncovered that this process of co-construction also existed in other forms, with deaf people using radio to participate socially and radio as an answer to their exclusion from other forms of entertainment.

This variation in deaf and hard of hearing people's experiences with radio was rarely commented upon and not given attention by influential members of the British deaf community. These members considered cultural forums with visual elements, such as cinema and television, to be solutions to the challenges presented by radio. I argue, however, that the debates surrounding these cultural forums further revealed the diversity of the British deaf community, the multitude of ways in which individuals engaged with emerging cultural forums, and how debates around engagement co-constructed both ideas of deafness and the forums themselves.

In Chapter 4, I focus on how the introduction of sound to cinema, i.e. 'talkie' cinema, affected the deaf community. Unlike radio, silent film was celebrated by influential members of the deaf community as an ideal cultural forum. However, as explored in the following chapter, deaf people's engagement with cinema was highly contested, and whilst powerful actors could promote a singular view on the radio – despite it not reflecting the realities of some deaf and hard of hearing people – cinema proved to be a forum around which the diversity and divisions within the British deaf community became increasingly apparent.

Chapter 4: The Cinema Scheme: Deaf responses to the transition from silent film to talkies, 1930-1945.

As explored in the previous two chapters, how and if deaf people engaged with radio was a contested but little-discussed topic within the British deaf community in the first half of the twentieth century. Blind people and the hearing public enthusiastically took up Wireless for the Blind, but the radio –both speech and music broadcasts – was not considered vital for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Whilst some deaf and hard of hearing people did engage with the technology, organisations such as the NID and deaf publications such as the *British Deaf Times* (*BDT*) and *Deaf Quarterly News* (*DQN*) largely ignored the topic or downplayed its use. Radio was constructed by officials within deaf organisations and journalists for deaf journals as a cultural forum that was beyond the bounds of the deaf community and serving as a new form of exclusion. Meanwhile, deaf people were considered non-users of the cultural forum by the hearing public and within the community itself, . Simultaneously, new lines of who was considered deaf were drawn around who could and could not engage with it.

In my archival research, however, a cultural forum that appeared in a very different light was silent film. Within Deaf media histories, the silent film era (1895-1930) has been canonised as a 'golden era' in which deaf and hearing audiences engaged with a medium on an equal footing.[436] Within the documents I have found, organisations for deaf people and deaf journals indicate a large amount of engagement within the deaf community and the tragedy of the introduction of talkies for deaf people – but fail to mention the sound elements of silent film and the cinema-going experience. Deaf people's engagement with silent film was constructed during the early twentieth century and beyond as unproblematic. I argue that silent film was never the ideal medium historians of Deaf culture have memorialised it as. Considering the contested nature of other technologies, such as radio and the telephone, it is unsurprising that sections of the deaf community have clung to it as a unique moment in which accessible mainstream entertainment was available.

In this chapter, I will problematise this narrative, alongside exploring the significance of the transition from silent to talkie films in the 1930s. Firstly, I will establish the opinions of journalists in deaf publications and wider mainstream media and their views on the utility of silent cinema for deaf people. In doing this, I explore the vast hopes placed on silent films

[436] John S Schuchman, 'The Silent Film Era: Silent Films, NAD Films, and the Deaf Community's Response' *Sign Language Studies* 4 (2004), 231-238 (p. 231).
Russell L Johnson, '"Better Gestures": A Disability History Perspective on the Transition from (Silent) Movies to Talkies in the United States', *Journal of Social History* 51 (2017), 1-26 (p. 1).

that it would be through them that public conceptions of sound, sign language and deafness would shift. I will contrast this with the reality of what mainstream publications put forward on the topic. Following this, I will investigate the realities of sound in silent films. Deaf and hard of hearing people faced practical challenges when visiting cinemas, for example communicating with cinema staff to purchase tickets. Another reality of cinema-going for deaf and hard of hearing people however, was that sound was always part of the silent film experience. Combining deaf history, sound studies and film scholarship, I will complicate existing narratives of silent film as a purely visual medium. I will also consider how deaf people, as 'users' of film, did not have the power to construct how cinema developed, unlike hearing 'users'. Whilst profoundly deaf people did not alter the emergence of talkies, the introduction of talkie cinema affected deaf communities and identities, isolating those who could not engage with sound in films and segregating them into audiences made up wholly of deaf people, within specifically deaf environments such as clubs and institutions.

To examine how deaf people became defined as a separate audience, I will explore how members of the deaf community, specifically profoundly deaf people, reacted to talkies. Whilst some were confident that deaf and hearing audiences alike would reject talkies, others tried to engage with them. In comparing the reaction in the American deaf community to talkies and that of the British, I reveal that whilst some called for protest, in Britain, there was little outcry over the plight of deaf people and talkies, with most protest remaining within the deaf community and expressed in deaf publications. Finally, I will recount the alternative solutions for deaf people who could not engage with talkies or did not want to. Captioned European films were offered as a solution, and some beseeched cinema managers to provide at least some silent film showings. By the late 1930s, however, the most viable solution was for deaf people to hold their own silent film showings within clubs and institutes. The British Deaf Association's Silent Film Scheme allowed deaf people to continue engaging with film separately from mainstream audiences.

The introduction of talkies not only excluded profoundly deaf people but exposed that, as a constituency of the cinema-going audience, they had little power to enact change or alter the course of sound cinema. The solution put forward by the British Deaf Association (BDA) to continue silent film screenings within environments that were predominantly deaf further separated deaf people from hearing audiences. As will be explored in Chapter Five, it also split profoundly deaf from hard of hearing audiences. It is clear from the sources I have analysed that deaf and hard of hearing people did engage with silent film and mourned its

downfall as talkies became the dominant film type of the twentieth century. However, the mediation of deaf people's engagement with cinema and how it has been historically recorded has ignored critical elements of cinema history. Deaf people were constructed as empowered audience members and then victims of exclusion. This has shaped cinema in the deaf community as a formerly accessible cultural forum that was cruelly taken away and turned into an exclusionary technology. Sound cinema, like radio was presented by members of organisations such as the BDA as inaccessible, and a barrier to deaf people's entertainment. However, as will be explored in Chapter Five, discussion around talkies in deaf organisations and journals revealed the contested ways in which deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with cultural forums. The diversity of hearing types and methods of communication in the British deaf community was highlighted by engagement with cinema, making it almost impossible to promote a single kind of interaction with cultural forums.

Developments in sound cinema also aided the formation of a separate deaf audience, as access to talkies became a new threshold of deafness and exclusion. The alternatives explored by individuals demonstrate that within the deaf community, cinema could be shaped to how deaf people desired. However, support outside of the deaf community was limited, restricting the extent to which deaf people could gain access. How deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with cinema is complex. Developments in the cultural medium shaped how deaf people used or rejected it. This, in turn, determined who within the deaf community could access cinema, resulting in separation and exclusion.

4.1. Silent Film and the deaf community, 1910-1929

> It may be a cold comfort to the deaf to know that the eye is going to be of far more importance than the ear, but such appears to be the case. People object to being asked to listen to an afternoon or evenings music now-a-days. They demand entertainment for the eye, and the body as well – hence the bioscope, the cinematograph, and the dance.[437]

This optimistic statement appeared in a 1914 edition of *BDT* under the heading 'The Future'. Whilst hyperbolic, the statement does give insight into the vast hopes that members of the deaf community placed in silent cinema. Some commented on how the medium would redefine the importance placed on sound and hearing, while others extolled its educational value or connection to sign language. As set out previously, silent cinema has been

[437] London, The British Library (BL), The British Deaf Times, PP.1108.BCD, 'The Future', *The British Deaf Times* 11.221 (January 1914), p. 21.

remembered in D/deaf cultural histories as a moment in time when deaf people could enjoy a medium in the same way as their hearing counterparts. While the experiences of deaf people at the cinema during the silent film era are difficult to come by, the tremendous amount of meaning placed on silent film and the hopes for what it meant for the deaf community is apparent in the records of deaf organisations and deaf publications. This section will analyse what was being discussed and how silent film and deafness were being presented.

Between 1912-1925, the editor of the *BDT*, Joseph Hepworth, published several articles on deaf people's experiences with cinema. In 1913, *BDT* reprinted a quote initially given to *The Daily Citizen* by a cinema manager. The manager spoke of two regular visitors, a hearing brother and a deaf sister, who regularly attended Saturday afternoon film showings. One day he 'happened to see the brother's hands spelling out in the deaf and dumb alphabet.'[438] The manager continued:

> I took an opportunity of getting into conversation with him, and he told me they would not for worlds miss their weekly visit. He said that the cinema had made all the difference in the world to them. Theatres had never really been a source of amusement, for the length of the best play made it slow and boring to a deaf person. The brisk acting of the cinema picture, giving a whole novel, so to speak, in tabloid form, is ideal from the standpoint of people who cannot hear, but have to glean the drift of the story from the gestures of the actors. And these, in the cinema, are, of course, accentuated.[439]

His statement indicates that deaf people were going to the cinema and that the physicality of the performances on screen benefitted them. Journalists for *BDT* continued to draw parallels between silent film acting and sign language. In 1916, T. Hayward wrote an article subtitled 'The Silent Stage Language of the Future'.[440] In it, they discuss the 'art of pantomime' for film actors and declare that 'if I read the signs of the time rightly, there is a great future for the sign language.'[441] They suggested that the importance film actors placed on gesture would make it a 'familiar art' and that 'as silent dramas are destined to play a great part of the entertainment of future generations, the art of mimicry will be captured by partygoers just as the fashions of actresses today are copied by women.'[442] Hayward goes so far as to suggest that deafness itself will be transformed in the eyes of hearing society, becoming more

---

[438] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'The Theatre of the Deaf', *The British Deaf Times* 10.117 (September 1913), p.202.
[439] Ibid.
[440] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'Cinemas and "Signs" – The Silent Stage Language of the Future', *The British Deaf Times* 13.147 (March 1916), p. 40.
[441] Ibid.
[442] Ibid.

respected and understood: 'In my mind, there is no doubt that the language of signs and gesture will become exceedingly popular, and, as this popularity grows, the importance of the human voice and of the faculty of hearing will diminish.'[443]

A 1913 *BDT* article celebrated the potential of the cinematograph as an 'educational adjunct' that could be utilised in schools for deaf children:

> [T]he cinematograph holds out bigger possibilities than this incidental acquisition of knowledge. It is quite on the cards that moving pictures will be utilised in schools to impress facts onto the minds of the scholars. In this connection, how useful this method will prove in the case of the deaf! The difficulties that stand in the way of teaching the deaf are enormous; in fact, they cannot be realised by those who are not actually engaged in the work.[444]

Cinema was also considered a suitable pastime for deaf women by the organisations they were service users of and those around them. The Annual Reports of the British Home for Deaf and Dumb Women mention that residents of the home would go to a local cinema. In 1923, the organisation thanked 'Dr and Mrs Murry [who] sent money on several occasions to take the girls to the cinema (the one form of amusement which the deaf and dumb can enjoy equally with the hearing).'[445] In 1925, it was not just individuals but the management of a local cinema which saw giving deaf women access to cinema as worthwhile: 'The management of the Clapham Rink Cinema very generously allow the girls to attend their cinema entirely free of charge. This sympathetic treatment is a real boon.'[446]

The regular reporting on cinema in *BDT* indicates an appetite amongst the publication's deaf readers for information on cinema. The journal would occasionally publish summaries of films that their journalists had seen.[447] An article from 1912 titled 'What Moving Pictures Really Are' claimed that 'the deaf are much interested in moving picture shows' and that 'it may be interesting to explain what these are.'[448] This is evidence of deaf people taking an interest in the entertainment aspect of cinema and technology development. In 1914, *BDT*

---

[443] Ibid.
[444] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'The Cinematograph as an Educational Adjunct', *The British Deaf Times* 10.113 (May 1913), p. 115.
[445] London, The National Archives (NA), The British Home for Deaf and Dumb Women Annual Reports ED 62/50, *The British Home for Deaf and Dumb Women Annual Report 1922-23*, 1923, p. 16.
[446] NA, The British Home for Deaf and Dumb Women Annual Reports ED 62/50, *The British Home for Deaf and Dumb Women Annual Report 1924-25*, 1925, pages of report unnumbered.
[447] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'The Deaf and The Cinema', *The British Deaf Times* 13.145 (January 1916), p. 5.
BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'The Cinema and The Deaf', *The British Deaf Times* 22.255-56 (March-April 1925), p. 26.
[448] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'What Moving Pictures Really Are', *The British Deaf Times* 9.99 (March 1912), pp.17-18.

published another article entitled 'How Cinematograph Shows are Produced – An Informing Article About Moving Pictures'.[449] The author of the article, J. Glenway, repeats claims about the medium's suitability for deaf people and that 'moving picture shows' were essentially 'an entertainment in a gigantic sign language'.[450] They also highlight why silent films were such an exciting prospect for the deaf community:

> In the theatre, the deaf man is more or less lost: in the concert hall is a stranger in a strange city. His infirmity precludes any enjoyment on his part at either of these public entertainments. In the case of the moving picture show, however, he stands on a level with his hearing.[451]

The suggestion that the experience of silent films placed deaf and hearing people on an even footing is also evident in more subtle ways. In August 1913, *BDT* editor Joseph Hepworth published a comment on the long-running joke that silent film actors could be lipread cursing in silent films. The journalist writes that 'lighter hearing journals' – meaning less serious publications – had been joking about 'the alleged detection by an expert lip-reader of objectionable expressions on the part of the actors.'[452] They continue:

> One paper gravely remarks: – "We can well believe this in the case of actors who are being thrown into ponds and otherwise roughly used. But our informant is indignant for the sake of any deaf-mutes who may happen to see the pictures" […] All of which is excellent fooling.[453]

This comment demonstrates that the lack of speech in silent films did not just put deaf people on a par with hearing audiences but perhaps were at a greater advantage due to their lipreading skills. As the previous chapter discussed, wireless separated many profoundly deaf people from popular discussions and news, whereas here, there is a sense of inclusion being put forward by *BDT*.[454]

The views recounted here are from sources within the deaf community, indicating what silent film meant to people involved with deaf publications and organisations. The era covered here, 1910-1925, was before wireless was taken up by almost every British

---

[449] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'How Cinematograph Shows are Produced – An Informing Article About Moving Pictures', *The British Deaf Times* 11.125 (May 1914), p. 114.
[450] Ibid.
[451] Ibid.
[452] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'The Cinematograph Joke', *The British Deaf Times* 10.116 (August 1913), p. 185.
[453] Ibid.
[454] Whilst the remit of this thesis is adult deaf and hard of hearing peoples' engagement with cinema, there is evidence in deaf journals of schools for deaf children going on trips to the cinema and before the popularisation of film, magic lantern shows. These accounts can be found in documents pertaining to schools such as the Yorkshire Residential School for the Deaf, and in journals such as the *Deaf Quarterly News* and *British Deaf Times*.

household, so this optimism is not a response to the events described in Chapter Three. Audio telecommunication was, however, increasingly utilised, and deaf people's struggles with live entertainment – concerts, theatre, lectures and more, were well established. The cinema was considered an alternative to live performances, prompting spokespeople within the deaf community to celebrate the silent film. Press coverage of the connection between deafness and silent film, however, was more mixed.

In 1923, journalist E.V. Lucas wrote an article for *The Times* contemplating the future of cinema. They suggested potential uses for the medium, such as educating children and showcasing Britain's natural habitats, but also that 'whatever the future of the cinema, one purpose it will always fulfil: it will always be the theatre of the deaf. Indeed the value of its kindness to the deaf cannot be overestimated.'[455] Lucas's confidence that cinema would remain accessible to deaf people was apparent in an earlier article by a columnist under the pseudonym 'V.V.V.'[456] They dismissed a suggestion in another newspaper that the next development in cinema technology would be to introduce speech to films. They also wrote that 'the great charm of the cinema is that it is silent and the most considerable boon ever offered to the deaf.'[457] These articles demonstrate that at least some mainstream media outlets were aware of silent cinemas' importance to deaf people across 1910-1925 and held sympathy, which was often lacking for deaf people.

Not all media, however, followed this reasoning. In 1921, film journalist Clayton Bertram wrote a piece for *Fortnightly Review* discussing film censors. In it, he wrote:

> It has been said that the cinema provides the ideal entertainment for the deaf, the dumb and the "daft". It is certainly the most popular resort of the young, the poor and the feeble-minded – for all of whom one may feel affection or compassion, while regretting that these sections of the community are now doing so much to set the intellectual standards of our amusements.[458]

Bertram projects stereotypical views of the era, associating deafness and non-vocalisation with a lack of intelligence. He perpetuates existing concerns that those considered less desirable by society would bring down the quality of everyone, in this case, via entertainment.

---

[455] The Times Digital Archive (TDA), E.V. Lucas 'The Cinema', *The Times*, Issue 43408 (1 August 1923), p. 11.
[456] ProQuest British Periodicals (PQBP), V.V.V., 'A Few Days Ago: A Random Chronicle', *The Sphere* 48.627 (27 January 1912), p. 130.
[457] Ibid.
[458] PQBP, 'The Cinema and its Censor', *Fortnightly Review* 109.650 (February 1921), pp. 222-228.

A 1920 cartoon drawn by George Belcher (Figure 1), and published in *The Tatler and Bystander*, also demonstrates that a positive association between deafness and silent film may not have existed in the ways that the deaf community had hoped. The cartoon depicts an elderly woman telling a man next to her that her daughter had taken her to the cinema, but that 'I'm so deaf I couldn't 'ear a word.'[459] Through the cartoon, Belcher reiterates stereotypes of deafness, old age and stupidity through association with silent film, a medium regarded so highly by the deaf community.

Figure 2[460]

Coverage of silent cinema by deaf organisations and publications demonstrated overwhelming optimism about what it would mean for deaf people. They suggested that the medium created equality between deaf and fully hearing audiences and that the art of silent film acting would reconceptualise hearing and sign language in the mind of general society. Deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with the cultural forum was presented as

[459] PQBP, Cartoon titled 'Wasted' by George Belcher, *The Tatler and Bystander* 75.974 (25 February 1920), p. 239.
[460] Ibid.

common and universal. The *BDT* even shared humorous exchanges that involved deaf people but as part of a joke rather than the butt of it. Press reporting was sometimes sympathetic and sometimes dismissive or negative about the association between deafness and silent film. This offers an insight into an alternative reading of the silent film era and the reality of deaf people engaging with it, something that is worth further development.

4.2. Problematising the narrative: sound in the silent film era

As set out in the previous sections of this chapter, deaf people's engagement with silent film was much celebrated by members of deaf organisations and the editorial teams of deaf publications. However, in combining D/deaf histories and histories of the cultural forum, those within the deaf community touting the ease with which deaf people could engage with silent film have ignored the sound element of the forum: something which has existed from its earliest days. Here I will explore some of the literature that reveals the sound aspects of silent film and why it is essential to acknowledge it when discussing how deafness and cinema are co-constructed around each other. I will also explore the practicalities not mentioned within source material that deaf and hard of hearing people had to face when engaging with cinema.

In Chapter One, I referred to scholars of Deaf history who have canonised the silent film era for the American Deaf community. John S. Schuchman presents the silent film era as a 'golden age' for deaf people participating in mainstream culture.[461] He writes of the 'comparatively equal access' to silent films compared to other cultural forums, such as radio. Similarly, Russel L. Johnson concurs, setting up the accessibility of the silent film era to then explore the difficulties faced by deaf and hard of hearing Americans when talkies became the standard within cinemas. As explored previously in this chapter, contemporary reporting on silent film within the British deaf community also presented this view of silent film.

However, in exploring the history of cinema and sound outside of D/deaf history, it is apparent that this is an uncritical assumption that neglects critical aspects of silent film as a cultural forum, as well as the challenges deaf people faced in engaging with it. A significant body of written work and sound archives are dedicated to the sound that accompanied silent

[461] John S Schuchman, 'The Silent Film Era: Silent Films, NAD Films, and the Deaf Community's Response', *Sign Language Studies* 4 (2004), 231-238 (p. 231).

cinema. Here my work engages with scholarship from the fields of musicology, film, media studies, and sound studies.

Martin Miller Marks writes that there has 'always been music in motion pictures.'[462] He offers a history of sound, predominantly music, as a key element of silent film from its earliest days. Pianists accompanied even the earliest film demonstrations, and live music continued to be a feature of film showings.[463] Mervyn Cooke concurs that 'as has often been remarked, the cinema has never been silent: the so-called silent films which represented the first flowering of the medium from the 1890s to the late 1920s often used sound as a vital part of the filmic experience.'[464] Cooke, however, does not credit the sound in silent films purely to music. He argues that sounds from the audience and the environment's noise – for example, the whirr of the film projector – also need to be acknowledged within the history of silent film.[465]

Experiments combining film and recorded sound took place in the 1920s but were only successful later in that decade.[466] One of the biggest changes brought about by recorded sound was the standardisation of the music audiences would hear. Previously, filmmakers would offer a guide to what music would suit a particular film. However, it was largely at the musicians' discretion what would be played, causing disparities between soundtracks of the same film at different times and locations.[467] Erin M. Brookes has also written of attempts to archive the music resources of the 'so-called silent films' for posterity.[468] The Silent Film Sound & Music Archive allows users to search online for recordings and musical scores, as well as other music-related materials from the silent film era.[469] The archive represents the fluidity of the sounds used in silent film; for example, users can search for a specific action, such as 'hurry' and the online archive will show results of the sort of sounds used for silent films depicting someone hurrying.[470]

---

[462] Martin Miller Marks, *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1985-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1997), pp. 3.
[463] Ibid., p. 9.
[464] Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 1.
[465] Ibid., p. 1-2.
[466] Miller Marks, p. 9.
[467] Ibid.
[468] Erin M Brooks, 'Silent Film Sound & Music Archive: A Digital Repository', *Journal of the Society for American Music* 14 (2020), 522-524 (pp. 522-524).
[469] Ibid.
[470] Ibid., p. 523.

The above scholars represent a snapshot of the work being done across various fields that problematise the narrative put forward during the twentieth century and today of silent film as an ideal medium for deaf people. There has always been sound, and whilst the visual nature of film and title cards allowed deaf and hard of hearing people to follow the films, the sonic elements of engaging with the forum are of note. This, in turn, raised debates on the social and cultural importance placed on sound and hearing. The above scholars, with little consideration of those who were deaf or hard of hearing, write about how sound contributed to the atmosphere, mood, and narrative. Deaf and hard of hearing audiences were engaging with silent film in a different, predominantly visual manner, something not considered in the literature or primary material relating to deaf and hearing people's experiences of silent cinema. As 'non-users' of the sound element of film, deaf and hard of hearing people did not shape how the technology developed with the increased use of recorded sound and speech. The hearing majority did, as demand for such films grew – although other groups resisted talkies from an artistic standpoint.

Aside from the film and soundtrack, the experience of deaf people attending the cinema is scarce in both archives and online newspaper archives. In the earlier sources, a deaf woman was accompanied by her hearing brother, or the women from the residential home were most likely taken by hearing staff members. Obstacles for deaf people engaging with silent film would have included transport, purchasing tickets, and being part of a majority hearing audience – but this is not mentioned in the sources. As demonstrated in the section above, optimism about what silent film meant for deaf people is apparent in the sources. Therefore, even at the time, and in retrospect, a large part of the story of deaf people's experiences with silent film is untold.

Reactions within the deaf community to sound in cinema only appeared in the late 1920s in response to talkies. Whilst the introduction of speech was a huge and detrimental shift in how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with cinema, it was not as simple as a shift from silence to sound. It is evident that deaf organisations and journalists have mediated deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with silent film to highlight both equality and exclusion, and as a matter through which they could bring public attention to the realities that deaf and hard of hearing people faced. Silent film was constructed as a cultural forum for deaf people, whilst talkies were constructed as excluding them. Meanwhile, deaf people shifted from being constructed as equal in ability to disabled by the forum. The use of speech also highlighted barriers between those who could continue to engage with cinema as part of

hearing audiences and those whose levels of deafness were made increasingly apparent as more audio obstacles arose.

4.3. Reactions to talkies in the deaf community

Whilst retrospective accounts of deaf people's experience of silent film have been selective and overly optimistic, the reaction to talkies within the deaf community during the years 1925-1945 does reveal a sense of loss and discrimination. In this section, I will investigate this response, which ranged from optimism that silent films would remain the standard in cinema to upset that the medium was now inaccessible to deaf people. I will also compare the response of the American deaf community to the reaction in Britain, as well as commenting on the value placed on deaf people as an audience constituency by hearing people within the film industry.

Within the journals of the deaf community the initial reaction to talkies was optimistic. During the early development of sound cinema James Perkins, the editor of the *BDT* was disappointed by the introduction but clung to some hope, writing that:

> The latest development in the film industry of the "Talkies", wherein the participants are made to speak as well as act their parts, seems to be yet another blow to one of the very few opportunities the deaf have of entertainment. It is hoped that the sub-titles that go to make the scenes depicted on the screen understandable to all will not be ruthlessly cut from the new "Talkies".[471]

Others, for example, a contributor going by the initials 'J. P. C.', were sceptical that the new technology would be successful amongst all audiences and usurp silent films. He wrote that he had spoken to 'well-known' film critics who claimed that 'the Talkies are already doomed', over-publicised by 'a few months of frenzied boosting and Press propaganda'.[472] J.P.C. goes as far as to write that a critic informed him that while they may be successful eventually, in general, audiences were paying little attention to talkies.[473] J.P.C., like James Perkins, hoped that the titles used to signpost the silent film narrative would not be removed in talkies. They optimistically wrote that 'it really does seem clear that our cinemas, or, at any

[471] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, J. Perkins, 'Talkies and the Deaf', *The British Deaf Times* 25.299-300 (November-December 1928), p. 113.
[472] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'Talkies and the Deaf', *The British Deaf Times* 27.303-4 (March-April 1929), p. 26.
[473] Ibid.

rate, 99 per cent of them will not turn over to Talkies in the Talkies' present state of imperfection.'[474]

In 1929, Selwyn Oxley went to a film showing that included talkie cinema to report his findings to the deaf community via *BDT*.[475] Oxley writes that 'we were able to judge of this development, and as we had a deaf companion with us, we feel that our opinion was in no way biased.'[476] As a hearing person, Oxley wrote that he could 'see very little in [the talkie's] favour' even though they attended 'one of the leading' cinemas in London.[477] He found the plot too slow and disliked the sound of the actor's voices, which he wrote were unclear. 'In short,' he concluded, 'the whole thing needs dramatic improvement.'[478]

Interestingly, within the *BDT,* there were conflicting views on the emergence of talkies. Two regular columns were 'Chat with our Readers', written by editor James Perkins, and 'Gleanings from Far and Near', a random news round-up by someone under the pseudonym 'The Gleaner'.[479] In 1930, Perkins remained optimistic that talkies would not supersede silent films as the norm in cinema: 'The totally deaf can take heart. It is the belief of those best able to judge that the "silent" film will hold its own against the advent of the talkie, and there is no sign of the silent film being on the wane in public favour.'[480] The same year, however, 'The Gleaner' wrote, ' It is hoped that it will be possible to add titles and short captions to talking films, as at the moment the deaf are at a serious handicap when there are so few silent films left.'[481]

The stark contrast between the optimism and pessimism of the two columnists demonstrated the contested nature of film as a technology for deaf people. Perkins remained attached to the notion that hearing audiences and deaf audiences were still aligned in their preferred engagement with cinema, whereas 'The Gleaner' saw the transition to talkies as another example of deaf people being cut off from hearing audiences. The sound technology

---

[474] Ibid.
[475] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, Selwyn Oxley, 'Talking Films and the Deaf', *The British Deaf Times* 26.309-10 (September-October 1929), p.101.
[476] Ibid.
[477] Ibid.
[478] Ibid.
[479] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, James Perkins, 'Chat with our Readers – 'Silent and "Talkie" Films', *The British Deaf Times* 27.313-4 (January-February 1930), p. 13.
BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'Gleanings from Far and Near', *The British Deaf Times* 27.323-4 (November-December 1930), p. 130.
[480] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, James Perkins, 'Chat with our Readers – 'Silent and "Talkie" Films', *The British Deaf Times* 27.313-4 (January-February 1930), p. 13.
[481] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'Gleanings from Far and Near', *The British Deaf Times* 27.323-4 (November-December 1930), p. 130.

used in talkies continued to improve, and they became the dominant type of film shown in British cinemas.[482] By mid-1932, *BDT* editor James Perkins changed his stance and acknowledged the 'troubles of a deaf person who goes to the cinema for entertainment in these days of talkies.'[483]

Perkins's comments were made in a tongue-in-cheek article in *BDT*, reporting on statements made by a deaf man on going to talkie film showings.[484] The article recounts comments by Mr L. Gedge, a deaf man from Catford, to a critic, Hannen Swaffer. The first time Mr Gedge went to a talkie, he could not follow the dialogue, so he selected an actor as the hero, however 'was surprised to see him come to a sticky end, as he was the villain of the piece.'[485] He joked, 'after thinking it over […] I came to the conclusion that I was the hero for seeing it through without having the slightest idea what it was about.'[486] The second time he went, he enlisted his brother to translate the dialogue into sign language but ran into some issues. His brother 'started to finger-exercise the plot until a woman sitting next to him watched his quick-making fingers suspiciously and then changed her seat.'[487] His brother also could not sign as quickly as the dialogue was happening, and Gedge commented that 'we were by this time the centre of a group more interested in us than the picture. So we called it a day and came out under a cloud.'[488] *BDT* editor James Perkins added his own note to the end of the article: 'We have not heard whether Mr Gedge has received any offers from cinema managers for his entertaining presence to divert the gaze of audiences when boosted and much advertised films are not so taking as they have been made out to be.'[489]

Whilst printed to amuse, the comments made in the article reveal some of the challenges faced by deaf people attending talkie screenings, both in terms of following the medium and being amongst hearing audiences. The comment by James Perkins is also clearly printed as a joke but indicates animosity in the deaf community against the dominance of talkie films. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, assistive technology was introduced to

[482] David Parkinson, *History of Film* (New York: Thames and Hudson,1995), pp. 83-84.
[483] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'The Deaf and Talkies', *The British Deaf Times* 29.341-2 (May-June 1932), p. 63.
[484] Ibid.
[485] Ibid.
[486] Ibid.
[487] Ibid.
[488]Ibid.
[489] Ibid.

cinemas, however little effort was made to standardise or improve them until the 1950s in Britain.

Alongside critiquing talkies, the previously mentioned article by Selwyn Oxley in *BDT* also contained a revealing comment on potential deaf and hard of hearing activism. After discussing his hopes that talkie films would still include title cards and captions, Oxley wrote that he hopes 'that the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will take this question up very seriously and get the Press to move so that they can at least have bare justice.'[490] Events in the United States may have inspired this, as the American hard of hearing community was protesting the shift from silent films to talkies.

In 1929, *The New York Times* published several articles on campaigns to include some written wording in talkies. In January, the newspaper published an article that read, 'all over the country voices are being raised by the deaf and hard of hearing against the "talkies" […] letters have been sent to the press, and protests have been registered with the producers of sound pictures.'[491] The article also mentioned that meetings of deaf and hard of hearing organisations were held in multiple cities across the country.[492] In April of 1929, the publication wrote of activity in multiple states; for example, there were protests in Massachusetts, and, in Philadelphia, hard of hearing clubs intended to send petitions to film producers threatening 'that the patronage of millions of deaf people will be lost by the displacement of Silent Pictures, and that one of their greatest sources of pleasure will vanish.'[493] The article continued to explain that 'the petitions will request the producers to continue the silent pictures, or at least use captions enabling the deaf to follow the story.'[494]

The protests in the United States by both hard of hearing and deaf organisations demonstrated that deaf activism in the country was more public facing than in Britain. Despite Oxley's hopes, the displeasure of deaf people with silent film remained contained mainly within publications designed for deaf people rather than the wider press. This highlights a difference both in the nature of the deaf communities in both countries and in the consideration given to deaf and hard of hearing people by hearing society.

---

[490] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, Selwyn Oxley, 'Talking Films and the Deaf', *The British Deaf Times* 26.309-10 (September-October 1929), p.101
[491] ProQuest – New York Times, 'Talkie Captions Asked by Deaf', *The New York Times* (9 January 1929), p. xx4.
[492] Ibid.
[493] ProQuest – New York Times, 'Deaf to Protest Sound Films: Urge Nation-Wide Petitions', *The New York Times* (2 April 1929), p. 13.
[494] Ibid.

The lack of provisions for profoundly deaf members of the cinema-going audience raises questions about the value placed on them as an audience constituency. BDT editor James Perkins wrote of the transition to talkies in 1928:

> The cinema has become a source of enjoyment – and to the older folk the only recreation – to thousands of deaf. The imminent change is viewed with alarm; and immediately raises the question of the consideration of a large body of people, and their right to a method of education and amusement.[495]

This was written just as talkies were being introduced, and as explored earlier, Perkins was optimistic in the few years after 1928 that they would not dominate silent film in cinemas. Here, however, he is immediately concerned that deaf people would, as they had been historically, be overlooked as part of the cinema-going audience. Perkins's later optimism was also founded on the idea that talkies were not desired by the hearing public or deaf people, which proved false as sound technology developed.

Ultimately, hearing audience members' engagement with talkies was prioritised and helped shape the medium's future. As will be explored in Chapter Five, hard of hearing and deaf people with peripheral hearing were considered an important faction of the cinema audience to cater for. As will be explored, however, concessions were not made for profoundly deaf people until much later in the century. Instead, they had to find solutions within the deaf community to continue engaging with film.

4.4. The BDA Cinema Scheme

4.4i. The search for alternatives to the talkies

Whilst the advent of talkies created new obstacles for profoundly deaf people who wanted to engage with cinema, some did find alternatives. These included making films within the deaf community, watching subtitled European films, and providing silent film showings within deaf organisations such as clubs and institutes. These actions demonstrate that there was still an impetus for deaf people to access cinema; however, this was a challenging undertaking. It also marked the separation of profoundly deaf audience members from both hard of hearing and hearing audiences.

---

[495] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, J. Perkins, 'Talkies and the Deaf', *The British Deaf Times* 25.299-300 (November-December 1928), p. 113.

In his work on leisure in the British Deaf community, Martin Atherton briefly mentions deaf clubs filming and then screening their outings and holidays.[496] Within the *BDT*, there was also mention of deaf people using the technology with members of the deaf community as the intended audience. In late 1930, *BDT* editor James Perkins wrote of a silent film being made in Birmingham with deaf actors using purely sign language. He noted that it was 'the outcome of a demand by various Midland deaf and dumb associations.'[497] In a 1931 *BDT* article commenting on the difficulty of talkies for deaf people and celebrating Charlie Chaplin, who remained in silent films, a picture was printed of deaf people watching a filmed sermon in sign language.[498] Reports of filmed religious services also appeared in 1938, showing the endeavour's longevity.[499] These examples demonstrate that whilst commercial films were becoming less accessible to deaf people, some were experimenting with the technology and producing media for themselves.

There were also calls within the deaf community to request help from cinema managers and those in charge of film distribution. In 1938, a *BDT* journalist applauded Mr P. E. Rodgers, the manager of a cinema in Wolverhampton, for devising a plan to send the synopsis of the films he was showing to deaf and blind patrons so that they could get a handle on the plot beforehand.[500] The journalist celebrated it as a viable solution to the inaccessibility of talkies and continued, 'this seems so simple that it surely could be universally adopted elsewhere – could it not?'[501] As late as 1946, some still requested silent film showings in cinemas; for example, Mr P. H. Coose of Salisbury wrote to *BDT* expressing that he hoped 'managers of cinemas in Salisbury and elsewhere will bring imagination into play and have a silent picture occasionally.'[502] But others suggested talkie films that were easy to lipread, such as Alan W. Darlington, who wrote to the publication in 1947 to recommend the film *Matter of Life and Death*. He claimed that as a deaf person, he

---

[496] Martin Atherton, *Deafness, Community and Culture in Britain: Leisure and Cohesion*, 1945-1955 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 134.
[497] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, J. Perkins, 'Chat with our Readers – Silent Talkie Production', *The British Deaf Times* 27.323-4 (November-December 1930), p. 113.
[498] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'Deaf Picture-Goers', *The British Deaf Times* 28.327-8 (March-April 1931), p. 27.
[499] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'Gleanings from Far and Near', *The British Deaf Times* 35.413-4 (May-June 1938), p. 53.
[500] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'Gleanings from Far and Near', *The British Deaf Times* 35.411-2 (March-April 1938), p. 28-29.
[501] Ibid.
[502] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, P. H. Coose, 'Letter to the Editor – Plea for the Silent Picture', *The British Deaf Times* 43.505-6 (January-February 1946), p. 15.

'saw this film and understood it all the way through.'[503] This demonstrates that there was a desire amongst deaf people to continue visiting cinemas with mainstream audiences, but with provisions such as a synopsis, a suitable genre, or the showing of a silent film.

By 1938, it was clear that the title cards that had signposted the plots of silent films would not be included in the now-dominant talkie films. In an article for *BDT,* A. K. Woodward wrote: 'If all films could be presented as are the few Continental ones in London, the "titles" would enable deaf lookers on to follow perfectly.' He wrote that in speaking to people within the industry, he found that they 'feared audiences might object' to captions or title cards.[504] Woodward suggested that they may not be as intrusive as they feared and that it could, in fact, help the film business: 'If gradually managers (or the producers of films perhaps are the people who are in authority?) could take this step, it would not only be an exceedingly kind action, but it should eventually increase audiences.'[505] He then lists the number of deaf people in Britain as recorded in the 1931 census, claiming that most had stopped going to the cinema but would likely return if subtitles were available.[506] Woodward's article attempted to frame deaf people as a valuable audience constituency. However, as he indicated himself, it was the apprehensions of hearing audiences that most concerned those in the film industry. His confusion over whose responsibility subtitles would be – managers or producers – also indicated a lack of knowledge amongst those campaigning for deaf people, knowledge that they could have utilised to make films more accessible.

Woodward's mention of 'Continental' – European films in a language other than English – is also significant. Between the late 1930s and 1950s, European foreign language films that were automatically captioned for British audiences were suggested as a way profoundly deaf people could engage with talkies. The Sheffield Institute for the Deaf's annual reports revealed that some organisations for deaf people resolved the issue of talkies by holding silent film showings within their organisations. However, when new silent films became difficult to come by, the so-called 'continental films' were used.[507] As early as 1938, *BDT* editor James Perkins criticised British cinemas for not showing more captioned

---

[503] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, Alan W. Darlington, 'Letter to the Editor – A Film Deaf Can Follow', *The British Deaf Times* 44.519-20 (March-April 1947), p. 33.
[504] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, A. K. Woodward, 'Films for the Deaf', *The British Deaf Times* 35.411-2 (March-April 1938), p. 34.
[505] Ibid.
[506] Ibid.
[507] Sheffield, The Sheffield Local Studies Library, The Sheffield Association in Aid of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Annual Reports 362.4 S, *The Sheffield Association in Aid of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Annual Report 1930,* 1930, p. 8.

European films, as in cities such as Paris screenings of such films were commonplace. He wrote that 'it certainly seems passing strange to us that British Film Exhibitors have so far lagged behind the foreigner in his approach to the people who do not understand the language that has been used in the production of the film.'[508]

Articles in the NID scrapbooks demonstrate that European films were available in some areas. For example, a journalist for the *Nottingham Evening Post* stated that when attending the screening of a subtitled European film, they 'noticed two people particularly enjoying the show. They are both stone deaf, and do not use hearing aids. Afterwards they told me they only go to see foreign films because they are able to follow the action by means of the English subtitles.'[509] They spoke to the manager of the cinema, Mr T. C. Knight, who told them that 'many' deaf people attended the European film showings and that 'of course they miss all the sound effects and voice intonation, but from the point of view of following the plot, subtitles are ideal'[510] One of the scrapbooks also contains a 1949 letter written to the editor of a publication that had been printed. In it, Mrs M. Hughes wrote: 'Sir – By showing foreign films with English subtitles the Electric Theatre are doing a service to the deaf, who are otherwise debarred from film-going. Could not the same method be used in English speaking pictures[?]'[511] The utilisation of European foreign language cinema again demonstrates interest amongst the deaf community in engaging with cinema and that accessibility was possible. However, the film industry did not take up the idea of using subtitles for English-language films. This suggests that while it was convenient that deaf people could follow captioned European films, it was more of a lucky coincidence than something designed and popularised with deaf people in mind.

4.4ii. Leslie Edwards Plan

As demonstrated above, there were members of the deaf community who still wanted to engage with films in cinemas alongside hearing audiences. Other members of the deaf

---

[508] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, J. Perkins, 'Chat with our Readers', *The British Deaf Times* 35.411-2 (March-April 1938), p. 37.
[509] London, Action on Hearing Loss Library (AOHL), RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Nottingham Evening Post*, 'Deaf-aid Films', 11 March 1954.
Relocated to: London, UCL Special Collections, RNID Scrapbooks, RNID/3/20/19-22, RNID/3/20/30-3, RNID/3/30/41, RNID/3/20/44.
[510] Ibid.
[511] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'The Deaf and Films', 17 February 1949.

community were, however, separated from mainstream audiences. In 1932, the secretary-treasurer of the British Deaf Association (known during the era as the British Deaf and Dumb Association – henceforth in this chapter BDA), Leslie Edwards (1885-1951), initiated a 'Cinema Scheme' sometimes also referred to as the 'Silent Film Scheme'.[512] Edwards encouraged local institutions to raise money for film projectors and screens, and the BDA would make up the shortfall to help them purchase the equipment needed for film screenings. Simultaneously, the BDA sought out and bought silent films to compile a 'Film Library' where collections of films could be rented out for a week to institutions around Britain.[513]

Leslie Edwards was a prominent figure within the British deaf community in the early-mid twentieth century. In the 1930s, he was Superintendent of the Leicester and County Mission to the Deaf and Dumb, Hon. Secretary-Treasurer to the Council of Church Missioners to the Deaf, and Hon. Registrar of the Joint Examination Board – alongside his role within the BDA.[514] In 1931, E. Bolton described Edwards in *BDT* as 'enterprising and energetic' as well as a 'livewire.'[515] A journalist in the *DQN* also stated that he was someone 'who does not do things by halves.'[516] As talkies emerged as the dominant film style in the 1930s, Edwards put his prominent position and energy behind providing deaf people with the option of viewing silent films.

The *DQN* regularly included articles on the NID and BDA, with representatives from each writing summaries of what the respective institutions were doing. In 1932, Leslie Edwards wrote of his activities relating to silent films.[517] He wrote of the difficulties in providing entertainment to deaf members of institutions during the winter months and the monotony of having few options available. He noted that members at his local Leicester institute were bored of 'conjuring shows' and missed films.[518] He disclosed:

> For the past two years, therefore, I have been experimenting with the various makes of "Home Cinema Projectors" in an attempt to get over this difficulty and to provide for a large audience. The result has been successful beyond expectation. In Leicester

[512] AOHL, British Deaf Association Annual Reports, *British Deaf Association Annual Report 1932*, 1932, p.5. Relocated to: London, UCL Special Collections, RNID/2/53.
[513] Ibid.
[514] BL, The Deaf Quarterly News P.P.1108.e., 'Leslie Edwards', *The Deaf Quarterly News* 101 (April/May/June 1930), p.2.
[515] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, E. Bolton, 'BDDA's Red Letter Week', *The British Deaf Times* 28.335-6 (November-December 1931), p. 22.
[516] BL, The Deaf Quarterly News P.P.1108.e., 'News and Notes – Leicester in 1931' *The Deaf Quarterly News* 102 (July/August/September), p.14.
[517] BL, The Deaf Quarterly News P.P.1108.e., L. Edwards, 'BDDA Annual Meeting – Mr. Edwards' Scheme to Supply Cinema to Every Mission', *The Deaf Quarterly News* 109 (April/May/June 1932), p. 8.
[518] Ibid.

> we now have a regular show of Silent Film Pictures and the Institute for the Deaf on a screen over 6ft. wide which is quite large enough for a gathering of 200 or more. Other missions have also purchased a similar cinema and speak of it as a great boon.[519]

Edwards then wrote of his grand ambitions to provide institutes across Britain with the capacity to hold similar screenings. He raised it at the annual delegates meeting of the BDA, a suggestion 'that received the unanimous and enthusiastic support of the delegates.'[520] He claimed that 'it is almost certain' that the Executive Committee of the BDA would approve the motion.[521]

Edwards gave details of his research into the endeavour. Having tried out various projectors, he settled on the Pathescope Lux projector model as the most suitable, pricing the cost of the projector, lenses, and screen at £25.[522] He proposed that the BDA purchase a 'Film Library' of Pathescope films that institutes could rent, suggesting that two and a half hours of film could be rented for 7/6 to 10/ per week.[523] Edwards wrote that he hoped missions would raise money to cover the expenses involved, but that for missions who could not, the projectors would be provided for free, and they could just rent the films.[524] In his conclusion, Edwards referred to the Wireless for the Blind Fund explored in Chapter One, demonstrating early comparisons between the two and the desire within the deaf community to claim a cultural forum as their own: 'A National Appeal was made to supply each Blind person with a free Wireless Set. Why not a National Appeal for a Cinema for the Deaf?'[525]

4.4iii – The rise and fall of the Cinema Scheme

Later in 1932, the editor of *DQN*, Ernest Ayliffe, announced in the publication that Edwards' scheme had been approved by the BDA Executive Committee and would be put into action.[526] The following year Edwards wrote another piece in *DQN* celebrating the 'great success' of the scheme, which had been established in thirty cities and towns across

[519] Ibid.
[520] Ibid.
[521] Ibid.
[522] Ibid.
[523] Ibid.
[524] Ibid.
[525] Ibid.
[526] BL, The Deaf Quarterly News P.P.1108.e., E. Ayliffe, 'Editor's Notes', *The Deaf Quarterly News* 111 (October/November/December 1932), p. 2.

Britain.[527] In their annual reports, the BDA published a selection of glowing anonymous letters from deaf people who had used the scheme in its first year:

> I should like to emphasise what a God-send this Cinema Scheme is to the deaf. Undoubtedly it is the greatest temporal blessing that has yet befallen the lot of the Deaf, and we can never speak too highly of the gratitude we owe you […] for bringing this great happiness and joy within the reach of those who are deprived of so much pleasure. (Birmingham)
>
> Your Scheme is certainly a tremendous success. My people are simply thrilled and often imagine they are in the usual cinema. (Northampton)
>
> The Scheme is giving every satisfaction and has provided a means of pleasure to all who have seen the pictures. I congratulate you on putting this matter forward. It has introduced a novelty that was badly required and is drawing many people back to the Club. (Southampton)[528]

These letters demonstrate the scheme's success and its popularity amongst deaf members of the institutions and organisations in which it was run. The final letter mentions that the silent film screenings attracted deaf people to clubs specifically for them, bringing members of the deaf community into contact with each other.

Regarding finance, Edwards wrote in the *DQN* that collections from audience members at the screenings sometimes produced a profit for the institute holding the event. Pathescope Co. gave deaf institutes discounts on their products, demonstrating sympathy for deaf people.[529] Edwards also added, however, that most missions could not pay the total amount for the projectors and needed grants from the BDA and that a large amount of interest from deaf organisations meant they needed more funds.[530] Another issue was the number of available silent films, which were not made in large numbers from the early-30s onwards.[531] Edwards wrote that 'care has therefore been taken so that the supply of films shall always exceed the demand' and that they had reduced the number of films that could be rented out per time from six to five.[532]

The BDA Cinema Scheme continued into the 1940s, with new institutes joining each year. In 1936, *BDN* celebrated that the deaf community had created 'a chain of […] silent

---

[527] BL, The Deaf Quarterly News P.P.1108.e., L. Edwards, 'The Cinema Scheme', *The Deaf Quarterly News* 112 (January/February/March 1933), p. 5.
[528] AOHL, British Deaf Association Annual Reports, *British Deaf Association Annual Report 1932*, 1932, p. 10.
[529] BL, The Deaf Quarterly News P.P.1108.e., L. Edwards, 'The Cinema Scheme', *The Deaf Quarterly News* 112 (January/February/March 1933), p. 5.
[530] Ibid.
[531] Ibid.
[532] Ibid.

cinemas' and that the provision of silent films was a 'godsend' to deaf people.[533] However, as talkies became the standard for cinema, silent film production slowed before ceasing almost entirely. In their 1944 annual report, the BDA Executive Committee announced the closure of the initiative:

> In view of present difficulties, the Committee has, with, regret, decided to close down the Cinema Scheme. Before the war this scheme enabled the deaf and dumb to enjoy a rota of silent films, but for many years no new films have been produced. An excellent offer was received for the purchase of the Association's film Library, which the Committee accepted, the proceeds being invested on behalf of the Ernest Ayliffe Home.[534]

The selling of the film library indicated that whilst valued by deaf people, organisations were willing to relinquish cinema in favour of additional funds during the difficult war years.

The introduction of sound into cinema caused the segregation of deaf audiences from mainstream, hearing cinema-goers, as deaf people were forced or chose to congregate in places specifically for members of the deaf community to access film. Alongside this physical separation, the disabling effect of sound on deaf people's ability to engage with cinema distinguished them as an identifiable minority. In emphasising deaf people's differences and giving them cause to gather, the introduction of sound into cinema contributed to the strengthening of D/deaf identities that would continue to grow and evolve in the later decades of the twentieth century. The use of silent film and the rejection of talkies by a significant part of the deaf community demonstrates how deafness and the cultural forum were shaped around each other. Deaf people were shaped publicly as at a loss; however, within the deaf community, they shaped themselves as a positive, separate audience who engaged with film in an alternative manner to the new standards set in mainstream cinema. Simultaneously, talkie cinema was shaped as being outside of the deaf community, something no longer for deaf people.

4.5. Conclusion

The transition from silent film to talkies significantly affected profoundly deaf people in Britain. Members of the deaf community, especially contributors to publications such as *BDT*, wrote optimistically about the medium. For example, hopes that focusing on visual

[533] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'Silent Films for the Deaf', *The British Deaf Times* 33.385-6 (January-February 1936), p. 16.
[534] AOHL, British Deaf Association Annual Reports, *British Deaf Association Annual Report 1944*, 1944, p. 5.

entertainment and gesture would change public perceptions of sign language and the concept of deafness and sound itself. Silent film offered an alternative to technologies profoundly deaf people had been excluded from, such as the telephone or radio, as covered in Chapter Three. Journalists in deaf publications wrote of deaf audiences experiencing film cinema on a par with hearing audiences, part of a diverse audience sharing the same event. Mainstream publications, however, did not universally support this idea, with deafness remaining the butt of jokes regarding silent film. This highlighted the position of deaf people as a group that received little sympathy and was consistently excluded from an increasing number of technologies as audio science developed in the twentieth century.

Literature on the abundance and importance of sound and music during silent film screenings is well established. However, within Deaf histories, it has been ignored as an element that could exclude deaf people. I argue that this is a deliberate attempt to mediate silent film as a unique cultural moment in the history of deafness that was cruelly snatched away. The narrative of deaf people being undermined and undervalued as audience members can still exist, however, when sound is considered. Deaf people can be conceptualised as both 'users' and 'nonusers' of silent film: they engaged with the visual but not the audio aspects of the medium. Deaf people's experience of cinema as a purely visual medium is still as valuable as the experiences of those who could hear the accompanying sound. Their non-use of the audio element of the technology as talkies became the film industry standard is significant, as those who could listen to it were valued above those who could not.

Whilst members of the deaf community were optimistic that their views of silent film aligned with the general, hearing audience, the popularity of talkies quickly became apparent. Profoundly deaf audience members were not considered valuable enough to the film industry to make provisions. It was up to members of the deaf community themselves to find solutions. Unlike in the United States, there appears to have been little in the way of popular protest by the British deaf community. This indicates the lack of power or public sympathy afforded to deaf people, as opposed to blind people, for example, during the era. It also suggests that deaf people were resigned to their exclusion and desired to be separate from hearing audiences and congregate together.

A prime example of this is the alternative means deaf people found to engage with cinema. The Silent Film Scheme initiated by Leslie Edwards of the BDA demonstrates a desire for accessible film within the deaf community. The scheme ended due to the lack of

silent films being produced and the pressing financial issues of the Second World War. Still, for the time in which it existed, the uptake of the scheme demonstrated a key shift in the British deaf and hard of hearing community. It reveals how the introduction of talkies pushed the separation of deaf people from hearing audiences.

Deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with cinema in the silent film era is recorded within the records of deaf institutions and in deaf publications. However, it was after the introduction of the talkies that this engagement was most prominently written about. I argue that this was an attempt by important figures within the deaf community to publicise the introduction of spoken soundtracks in cinema as a loss to the entire deaf community and raise public sympathy for the welfare of deaf people. Their discussion of cinema constructed deaf people as excluded from the cultural forum, with the solution to this being for deaf people to watch silent films in audiences consisting of only other deaf people.

In Chapter Five, however, I will explore how this response did not represent the whole of the deaf community. As new cultural forums emerged, the choices that deaf and hard of hearing people made around how, or even if, to engage with them became increasingly diverse. Publications and organisations for deaf people began to take different stances on cultural forums. Therefore, deaf people's engagement with them was mediated in increasingly diverse ways, and ideas of deafness and cultural forums were co-constructed in different ways. As I will demonstrate, the introduction of talkies revealed these fractures in the deaf community, as some rejected them, and others sought means to access their sound component.

Chapter 5: Accessing the talkies: Engagement and assistive technology in cinemas, 1945-1955.

Whilst Chapter Four focused on how profoundly deaf people found alternatives to talkie cinema, here I explore how some partially deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with sound cinema from 1945-1960. During this era, the NID, though preoccupied with all types of deafness, tended to highlight the issues faced by those with some peripheral hearing rather than profoundly deaf people. Encompassed in this shift was cinema, which the NID presented within the deaf community as a cultural forum with which they could and should engage. The NID made a concerted effort to report news on cinema to the deaf community through their reports and journal, *The Silent World*, and actively tried to improve accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing people in British cinemas.

Previously, I focused on how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with silent film and how silent film was mediated by those with influence in the deaf community, resulting in specific constructions of deafness and the cultural forum. Deaf people were constructed as unable to access talkies and talkies as something outside of the deaf community. One of the key elements of this was the Silent Film Scheme run by members of the British Deaf Association (henceforth BDA). During the twentieth century, the BDA became increasingly occupied with matters concerning profoundly deaf people, for whom interacting with audio phenomena was largely off the table. The NID shifted in the opposite direction, focusing on hearing aids, assistive technology, and those with significant peripheral hearing. The first part of this chapter will highlight the NID's shift in perspective, primarily through the organisation's mouthpiece, *The Silent World* (*TSW*), which they began publishing in 1946. Despite the name, the NID framed the magazine as targeting a readership of deaf, hard of hearing and hearing people. This broadening of their remit meant that matters of sound and technology beyond hearing aids were discussed, and cinema once again was considered pertinent to deaf and hard of hearing people.

I will discuss how the NID and the wider deaf community engaged with cinema. This included a popular film column and prominent coverage of films of the era that included deaf characters. There was also extensive coverage of two critically acclaimed films outside of the deaf community, *Johnny Belinda* (1948) and *Mandy* (1952). Examination of this coverage both within and outside the deaf community reveals what value the NID were purposefully and publicly placing on cinema, both for deaf and hard of hearing people and as a tool for raising awareness of the cause of deafness.

In the last section of this chapter, I will explore the cooperation between the NID and Gaumont and Odeon Cinemas as they worked on experiments to make deaf and hard of hearing people aware of assistive technology in cinemas. The attempts to provide assistive aids constructed a specific kind of deaf or hard of hearing person who engaged with cinema, namely one who could use the assistive technology, and, as a result alienated those who could not.

This chapter uncovers the different relationship those who could engage with sound through assistive technology had with cinema compared to profoundly deaf people. By studying how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with cinema, this chapter will reveal how diverse individuals' experiences with the cultural forum were. Unlike radio, as explored in Chapter Three, members of organisations and publications struggled to mediate a consensus on how, or even if, people in the deaf community engaged with cinema. This indicates the growing differences within the British deaf community, which became more apparent as the twentieth century progressed and were highlighted by discussion around cultural forums.

The topic of cinema is also an effective way to examine the changing focus of the NID and the value placed on deaf people as a portion of the cinema-going audience – both within the deaf community and as part of mainstream, hearing audiences. The varying approaches and attitudes of the BDA and NID to cinema as a cultural forum co-constructed deafness and cinema differently. Within the BDA, only silent film was considered beneficial, and deaf people presented as unable to engage with talkies. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the NID shifted its focus to prioritise hard of hearing and deaf people who could use assistive technology, presenting them as a group of people who were searching for a technological solution to access talkies. Here it is obvious where new lines were drawn in the deaf community, shaped by engagement with new cultural forums and shaping those cultural forums in turn.

5.1. Shifting towards sound: The NID and *The Silent World*

As demonstrated in previous chapters, officials within the NID were focused on hearing aids as opposed to other audio technologies. Detailed debates around hearing aids and the activities of NID members relating to hearing aid technology can be found in the NID

Annual Report Medical Sub-Committee Reports.[535] However, as hearing aid technology improved and the first state-sponsored hearing aid, the Medresco, became available on the NHS, they expanded their remit. They began to comment on other matters concerning sound and hearing, particularly in the case of cinema and assistive devices. In this section, I will examine this shift, the introduction of the NID mouthpiece magazine, *The Silent World*, and the significance of this for the deaf community and what it meant for deaf cinema audiences.

The interwar and post-war years were significant for charities for deaf people. Whilst not as obvious or immediate to the public and government as the challenges facing blinded veterans, there was enough support to campaign for several pieces of successful legislation that helped improve the welfare of deaf people.[536] The introduction of the National Health Service (NHS) also helped deaf and hard of hearing people acquire hearing aids and demonstrated that government attention was being turned to matters of deaf welfare. However, those who could and wanted to have technological assistance were only a portion of the deaf community, creating further gulfs between different types of deafness and identities.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the NID explicitly claimed to represent all types and levels of deafness, for example, through their homes and institutes for profoundly deaf people. However, as hearing aid technology became more available, officials within the organisation spent a great deal of time and effort setting out guidelines and giving advice to deaf and hard of hearing people so that they could avoid being taken advantage of by commercial hearing aid companies. Post-war, and with the introduction of the NHS hearing aid, The Medresco, they again committed resources to promoting the device and providing advice about it. Evidence of this is found in the 1949 NID Annual Report: in the report of the Annual General Meeting, Chairman R. Scott Stevenson spoke of the bureau that

---

[535] This resource can be found at The British Library, London: *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports*, P.P.1108.cbh.
Coreen McGuire and Jaipreet Virdi have also used the Medical Sub-Committee Reports in their article on Phyllis M. Tookey Kerridge: Jaipreet Virdi and Coreen McGuire, 'Phyllis M. Tookey Kerridge and the science of audiometric standardization in Britain', *The British Journal for the History of Science* 51(2018), 138-155.
[536] London, The British Library (BL), National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1943-44*, 1944, p. 9.
BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1948*, 1948, p. 20.
This legislation included The Disabled Persons (Employment) Act, 1944; The Education Act, 1944; The National Health Service Act, 1946; The National Insurance Act, 1946; National Assistance Act, 1948.

had been set up to advise people on the new government aid.[537] He claimed that the NHS 'has made us busier than ever. We have to answer hundreds of questions.'[538]

Stevenson continued his speech, making several statements that clarified both how officials in the NID viewed the organisation and how the organisation considered its deaf service users. He spoke of the organisation refusing 'Government grants or assistance', wanting to maintain its position as a 'watch-dog for the deaf' that could criticise the government when needed.[539] However, Stevenson's assessment of the present government was overwhelmingly positive, stating that it 'has done more for deaf people than any other Government in any other country has ever done.'[540] This was mainly in reference to the Medresco hearing aid, which the NID wholly supported. Stevenson dismissed 'grumbles' at long waiting lists, and claimed:

> People criticize the Government hearing aid; to a person accustomed to a hearing aid that may cost up to sixty guineas the Government one looks comparatively clumsy; but to those who have never in their life had one, or had the sixty guineas to buy one with, the Government aid is not only an efficient and economical aid – it is a very good job indeed.[541]

In this speech, transcribed and published in the Annual Report, Stevenson's words exemplify the support for assistive technology in the NID, that the organisation considered itself to represent deaf people in Britain, and that deaf people should be grateful for the availability of a government hearing aid. What is not recorded is the situation of deaf people who could not, or did not wish to, use hearing aid technology. This was a pivotal moment in fracturing the British D/deaf community in the twentieth century, as sign language or conceptions of deafness as a positive identity were dismissed. This is evident later in Stevenson's speech, where he announced: 'The Government hearing aid, of course, is not the solution to deafness; it is only a part, and a very small part, of the solution to the problem of deafness.'[542]

As well as shifting to accommodate specific types of deafness rather than all deaf and hard of hearing people, the NID became hugely preoccupied with publicity during the post-war era. Capitalising on the concern for deafened veterans, the NID Annual Reports frequently referred to the institution's increased efforts to raise public awareness of deafness.

---

[537] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1949*, 1949, p. 6.
[538] Ibid., p. 5.
[539] Ibid., p. 6.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Ibid.
[542] Ibid., p. 7.

The 1948 Report of the Executive Committee reads, 'A national press publicity campaign designed to bring to the notice of the public the various aspects of work amongst the deaf has been planned and is now in operation.'[543]

A vital element of this publicity campaign was a new mouthpiece for the NID, *The Silent World* (*TSW*) magazine. The first edition was published in June 1946, after consultation between the President of the NID, the Duke of Montrose, and the Ministries of Health, Labour and National Service, who supported the application to 'Paper Control', who implemented the post-war rationing of paper.[544] The Duke of Montrose spoke of the magazine at the 1946 Annual General Meeting of the Council.[545] As reported in the 1945-6 NID Annual Report, he called it 'a very important undertaking' that would enable deaf people 'to keep in touch with one another and to read about the experiences, the courage, and the sufferings of others in their own case.'[546] Significantly, however, deaf people were not the only readership the NID hoped to attract. Montrose stated that:

> It is written and produced in such a way which we hope will interest hearing people as well. If we can persuade as many hearing people as possible to read *The Silent World* it will perhaps help them to have a better understanding of the trials we deaf people have to face. The important thing we want them to realize is that because you are deaf it does not mean to say you are useless [..] Through *The Silent World* we hope to make such people understand that the deaf can do useful and successful work and prove a help to the country as a whole.[547]

Montrose repeated these sentiments in the introduction to the first edition of *TSW*:

> One of our chief aims is to put ourselves across to the hearing, and – no less – to bring the hearing across to us. There is still far too much diffidence and suspicion on our side, and too much embarrassment and lack of understanding on theirs. They don't mean it – we don't mean it.[548]

He also made it explicitly clear that deaf people should not feel sorry for themselves but instead take on personal responsibility and attempt communication with hearing people and

[543] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1948*, 1948, p. 23.
[544] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1945-6*, 1946, p. 13.
[545] Ibid., p. 4.
[546] Ibid.
[547] Ibid, pp. 4-5.
[548] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'A message from His Grace the Duke of Montrose', *The Silent World* 1.1 (June 1946), p. 3.

be part of wider society: 'we have lots to do and no time left for "sob-stuff", and so we must just pull together and get on with the job.'[549]

His statements reflect the NID's position on deafness post-war: deaf and hard of hearing people were expected to use assistive devices where possible, take responsibility for communicating with hearing people, and serve as examples of how 'useful' deaf people could be to Britain. These pillars of the NID were reflected in *TSW*, as space was given to articles and columns on sound, hearing, and technology. The publication included 'How it Works' articles on assistive devices, including hearing aids, in which they would break down the technology, including diagrams.[550]

One of the most notable inclusions was the frequent references to cinema and how deaf people could engage with the medium of film. As explored in the previous chapter, for profoundly deaf people, the solution to the issue of talkies was to hold private screenings of old silent films. As will be examined in the remainder of this chapter, there were, however, other options for those who could and wanted to use assistive technology. These were reported avidly in *TSW*, demonstrating that this group within the deaf community was the priority of the NID, creating further divides in the deaf community. It also demonstrated that different groups within the deaf community took varying approaches to cinema from 1930 to 1960.

5.2. Reporting on Cinema

Using editions of *TSW*, I will explore how the NID demonstrated their interest in cinema from 1945-1955, with additional material from the organisation's Annual Reports. Unlike radio, pieces on film and cinema-going frequently appeared in *TSW*. The clearest example of this is the film column, which existed in various forms from the magazine's inception in June 1946 until 1955.

In the magazine's first edition, a journalist under the pseudonym 'Gemini' wrote a column named 'Entertainment'.[551] The column primarily consisted of reviews of films currently playing in cinemas. Rather than comprehensive reviews, they were short, light-hearted snippets that included information that would be helpful to deaf and hard of hearing

[549] Ibid.
[550] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'How It Works', *The Silent World* 1.1 (June 1946), p. 20.
[551] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, Gemini, 'Entertainment', *The Silent World* 1.1 (June 1946), p. 22.

cinemagoers. For example, the film *On the Carpet* was considered to have 'a good clear soundtrack', whilst *You Only Live Once* was 'highly visual, and pretty easily followed without the soundtrack.' A specific actor was even highlighted as being accessible to deaf people: in *The Corn in the Green* 'Bette Davis, as usual, being a gift to lip readers.'[552] Also of note was the introduction to the column, in which 'Gemini' writes out a scenario in which a deaf person enjoyed the cinema:

> "Fillums-?" Said our best girl friend but one with her eyes sparkling. "You bet! I just love the fillums."
>
> "But you can't hear the soundtrack." we objected.
>
> "I can sometimes," she said, "and anyway there are easy ones, with people falling downstairs and getting doors banged on their faces. And those beautiful foreign ones with captions – ah me! These are indeed the best of all – almost as good as the dear old silent ones."
>
> "Come then," we said, and taking our girl friend tenderly by the arm we guided her round London to see some of the newer deliveries.[553]

This scenario indicates who officials at the NID and *TSW* envisioned engaging with talkie cinema: a deaf person with some usable hearing who was accompanied by hearing associates. The tips in the review focus on hearing and lipreading, and whilst captioned films are briefly mentioned, the focus is on oralist methods of communication. This highlighted the type of deaf person the NID wished to present to the general public and the deaf community: someone wanting to engage with a mainstream cultural forum, integrate with hearing people and find methods – such as watching slapstick or foreign films – that do not intrude on hearing audiences. Cinema itself is shaped as a suitable leisure activity for deaf and hard of hearing people. Interestingly, as in Chapter Four, reference is made to silent film as a lost benefit. In doing this, the NID both encourages deaf people to engage with cinema, indicates how deaf and hard of hearing should try to interact, but also makes it clear that something has been lost and that sympathy is in order – something useful for an organisation that is trying to draw hearing people into the deaf community and support its cause.

Whilst the 'Gemini' columns were informal and jovial, in 1947, Paul Dehn, a career critic, began writing an official film column, 'Films of the Month'.[554] It contained the

[552] Ibid.
[553] Ibid.
[554] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, Paul Dehn, 'Films of the Month' *The Silent World* 2.6 (November 1947), p. 163.

subheading 'he will tell you of the new films worth seeing – and never mind hearing'.[555] The column was similar to 'Gemini's' but in a more formal format. In the April of 1948, a reader of *TSW*, Joan Tetlow from Rochdale, had her letter praising the film column published:

> Sir, – After reading several of Mr Dehn's articles I should like to say how much I enjoy them. Whether or not I have any intention of seeing the films mentioned I find the articles a pleasure to read in themselves. Mr Dehn shows a very human understanding of the deaf person's difficulties and brings to his task a happy blend of tact and humour. The suggestion of making a synopsis available has my whole-hearted support. I would like, too, to see the name of the original book given more clearly when a film is taken from a book, then one could read the original work. So very often the title of the film is changed out of all recognition.[556]

This letter anecdotally reveals that for some, the column was welcome. Still, more significantly, *TSW* was a forum for discussing cinema, including deaf and hard of hearing people's suggestions on how to access talkies. From both columns, it can be inferred that both writers were hearing, suggesting that the communication methods prioritised by the NID were designed to encourage deaf people to assimilate into the hearing world. Dehn's column remained in *TSW* until 1951, when a new critic, Matthew Norgate, took over.[557] In 1953, the column was discontinued, although the magazine published a letter of complaint about its removal.[558] The NID used cinema as a way of both presenting specific constructions of deafness and as a way of raising public sympathy and donations. They attempted to do this via cinema; however, this waned as the 1950s progressed. The removal of the column reflects this shift.

Another way the editors of *TSW*, and therefore the NID, celebrated sound cinema was by reporting extensively on films with deaf characters and deafness as a dominant theme. Two notable films for which they did this were *Johnny Belinda* (1948) and *Mandy* (1952). Based on a Broadway play, the American film *Johnny Belinda* tells the story of a 'deaf-mute' woman, Belinda, who is treated as socially and intellectually inferior in her town and by her family. A doctor moves to the town and realises that Belinda is incredibly intelligent. The hearing doctor then teaches Belinda to read and use sign language. Belinda is sexually assaulted and becomes pregnant, resulting in the birth of her son Johnny. The fallout from the assault leads to two townspeople being murdered, with the film culminating in Belinda

---

[555] Ibid.
[556] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'What's Your Opinion – Film Critic', *The Silent World* 2.11 (April 1948), p. 347.
[557] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, Matthew Norgate, 'Films of the Month', *The Silent World* 5.8 (January 1951), p. 238.
[558] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Film Reviews', *The Silent World* 8.5 (October 1953), p. 156.

proving to a court that she is a good mother. The film was nominated for 12 Academy Awards, with the actor playing Belinda winning best actress. It also won two Golden Globes, alongside numerous other awards.[559]

In the British film *Mandy*, a mother and father struggle to educate their deaf daughter, the titular Mandy. They enrol her in a school for deaf children, and the film focuses largely on the oralist education methods used in such schools during the era. The film culminates in Mandy saying a few words, most notably giving her name to a group of hearing children, with the implication being that she could now socialise with them. The film gained several awards at international film festivals and was nominated for six British Academy Film Awards (BAFTAS).[560]

Taking evidence from the NID Annual Reports 1945-1955, the organisation strongly supported the films, with officials particularly pleased with their awareness-raising potential. In his 1949 speech at the Annual General Meeting of the NID, chairman R. Scott Stevenson said:

> One of the most striking things that happened during this last year – not that I need to give any advertisement to film companies, they are only too good at it themselves – was the great success of the film "Johnny Belinda".[561]

Stevenson claimed that he was sceptical about the film and did not often go to the cinema but enjoyed it immensely.[562] Later in the same Annual Report, under the subheading 'Publicity', the council of the NID wrote:

> Probably by far the greatest publicity the problem of deafness has received has come from an unintentional source. The Warner Brothers film, "Johnny Belinda" has probably created more public interest in the problem of the deaf than any planned press campaign could have done, however costly.[563]

A February 1949 edition of *TSW* exulted the film also. The edition's cover was devoted to the film, with the headline 'Film of the Year.'[564] The editor wrote:

---

[559] British Film Institute, 'Johnny Belinda (1948)', *BFI* < https://www2.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b6ada1534> [accessed 5 December 2022].
Leonard J Leff, 'What in the World interests Women? Hollywood, Postwar America, and Johnny Belinda', *Journal of American Studies*, 31 (1997), 385-405 (pp. 386-391).
[560] Mark Duguid, 'Mandy (1952)', *BFI Screen Online* < http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/443769/> [accessed 5 December 2022].
[561] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1949*, 1949, p. 7.
[562] Ibid.
[563] Ibid., p. 35.
[564] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Film of the Year', *The Silent World* 3.9 (February 1949), p. 259.

> If all the resources of all the Deaf societies in the English-speaking world had been put together, it is doubtful whether they could have produced half so moving and effective a piece of propaganda as that afforded quite unintentionally in the Warner Brothers' film Johnny Belinda, with its deaf and dumb heroine, its amateur but successful teacher-of-the-deaf hero.[565]

The journal reports that the film has the 'official blessing' of the NID and made 'no apology for devoting a large part of this issue of our magazine to Johnny Belinda.'[566] The above quotes reveal that the film's publicity was more valuable to them than the representations of deaf people themselves. During this era, the NID was spending increasing amounts on publicity and, naturally, would be enthusiastic about free coverage and access to hearing audiences.

Similarly, in the 1953 NID Annual Report, a transcript of the Minister of Labour and National Service Sir Walter T. Mockton MP's speech to the Annual General Meeting was published.[567] He spoke of the importance of deaf children learning to communicate using oralist methods 'and thereby avoiding the danger that deaf children may be retarded mentally and socially.'[568] He mentioned *Mandy*, which he called 'a wonderfully moving film', as an example of 'the way in which that problem has been dealt with' and commended it for bringing 'the problem of the deaf child before a nation-wide audience.'[569]

As the official magazine of the NID, *TSW*'s reporting on the films was equally positive and endorsing. In 1949, the editor published a six-and-a-half-page feature on *Johnny Belinda* and again allocated a large space for a feature on *Mandy* in 1952. Also in 1949, the magazine published a letter from Jane Wyman, the actor who had played Belinda, thanking *TSW* for their coverage after a Warner Brothers executive had given her a copy of the publication.[570] This again shows *TSW* as a platform where discussions of deafness and film took place.

The NID documents and *TSW* editions also demonstrated an endorsement of the oralist, ableist depictions of deafness in films. This again affirms that the institution was catering for a group of people within the deaf community who wanted to, and could, engage

---

[565] Ibid.
[566] Ibid.
[567] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1953*, 1953, p. 18.
[568] Ibid.
[569] Ibid.
[570] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, Jane Wyman, 'What's Your Opinion', *The Silent World* 3.12 (May 1949), p. 378.

with sound and hearing. Criticism of the films was dismissed. For example, in April 1949, a 'totally deaf' woman Winifred Cowell, wrote to *TSW*'s 'What's Your Opinion' page to complain about Johnny Belinda due to the 'sordid' story of 'murder and immorality'.[571] She 'realised that the deaf girl was not the real attraction to the hearing people who went to see this film, but the story itself.'[572] Cowell continued that the film made her feel ashamed of her deafness and that she pretended she was not deaf 'until I was clear of the cinema.'[573] The editor of *TSW* allowed this critical letter to be published, however alongside it an editor's note defending the film was printed, writing that it was necessary to attract public attention to deafness and that any issues in the film were less important than the potential benefits it could bring to real deaf people facing hardship.[574]

Mainstream press reporting from the time also hailed the film as a success, with a critic in *The Times* labelling it 'a film that allows itself to indulge in melodramatics and yet manages to keep its integrity.[575] The critic focused on the acting of the lead, Miss Jane Wyman, who played Belinda. They celebrate her use of sign language. However, they write that it is secondary to other aspects of her acting:

> Belinda grows up in poverty and ignorance of a deaf-and-dumb language, and even when a sympathetic doctor (Mr Lew Ayres) has taught her and her physical gestures are emphatic and elaborate, she continues to act with an inner radiance, a startled and dawning awareness of the richness of unfolding worlds.[576]

Tatler and Bystander film critic Freda Bruce Lookhart focused on the sexual violence in the film and celebrated its success. However, she scarcely mentioned sign language and deafness, instead commenting on the excellent acting and direction.[577] This essentially marks the tone of the film's mainstream reporting – deafness and matters associated with it were not discussed in the depth the NID insinuated.

---

[571] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, Winifred Cowell, 'What's Your Opinion – Johnny Belinda' *The Silent World* 3.11 (April 1949), p. 348.
[572] Ibid.
[573] Ibid.
[574] Ibid.
[575] The Times Digital Archive (TDA), 'New Films in London – Unusual Acting', *The Times*, Issue 51259 (20 December 1948), p. 6.
[576] Ibid.
[577] ProQuest British Periodicals (PQBP), Freda Bruce Lookhart, 'At The Pictures: Thank Your Stars', *The Tatler and Bystander* 190.2477 (29 December 1948), p. 404.

Where the deeper topics of the film are discussed, it was in debates on whether cinema should try to educate people on social issues. The London film magazine *Picture Show* ran a letter in August 1949 from Herbert S. Briscoe of Birmingham. He wrote:

> When I go to the cinema I go to laugh, or to be thrilled or moved, or because I like spectacle; in short, I go to be entertained. I do not mind if the "entertainment" provokes thought (if the film is of the quality of "Gentlemen's Agreement" or "Crossfire" or "Johnny Belinda," well, then so much the better). But I do not go to be educated.[578]

Miss M. A. Morris responded, and her letter on educational films was also published:

> For myself I thoroughly approve of them. Naturally I go to the cinema to be entertained, but my choice of entertainment is very wide. I liked "Johnny Belinda" as a truly appealing film, I liked "Good Sam" and "Whiskey Galore" as rollicking comedies, I liked "Yellow Sky" as an entertaining Western […] But education films also rank high in my estimation, especially geographical feature films, which bring a welcome glimpse of the outside world to people, who, probably like myself, wish to learn more about the world in which we live, to add and to illustrate the information gathered from school text books. I also think that more films about political and economical conditions throughout the whole of the world would help people to understand the necessity for, and prompt them to co-operate more in the fight for world peace.[579]

These letters highlight the value placed on cinema by hearing audience members in the post-war years. However, unlike the NID's claims that Johnny Belinda was serving to promote deafness as a cause, the discourse around it is once again diverted to other debates. This indicates that whilst encouraging deaf and hard of hearing people to engage with cinema, the organisation was also over-emphasising how hearing audiences engaged with it.

A few years later, the coverage of *Mandy* was similar. For example, profiles of the hearing actors involved were focused on rather than deafness and the welfare of deaf or hard of hearing people.[580] Some critics did focus on the effects of deafness on the titular character:

> She suffers from the thoughtlessness of other children, who think her stupid, queer and selfish. She has fits of hysterical passion when she can't make herself understood. By the time she is seven years old it has become apparent that Mandy must be sent away to school; not an ordinary school but a deaf-and-dumb school […] Th triumph

[578] PQBP, 'Entertainment, Not Education', *Picture Show* 53.1376 (13 August 1949), p. 14.
[579] PQBP, 'In Favour of Educational Films', *Picture Show* 53.1388, (5 November 1949), p. 14.
[580] PQBP, Edith Nepean, 'Round the British Studios: Scenes From "Mandy"', *Picture Show* 58.1514 (5 April 1952), p. 11.

> of pronouncing her own name, in a flat voice, certainly, but with perfect clearness, is the climax of the picture.[581]

This review, and others in a similar vein, achieved what the NID had hoped – a tragic exploration of deafness that pulled at the hearing public's heart strings. Additionally, the 'climax' of the film was a child successfully using oralist methods and speaking, demonstrating the NID's ideas of how deaf children should be educated. *Mandy* is also celebrated as being a British film and as a representation of the success of British deaf schools.

The coverage of the films in the mainstream press demonstrated both agreement and variation with what the NID was promoting. The coverage of cinema in *TSW* and NID Annual Reports confirmed not only that leading figures within the organisation were focusing on specific types of deafness but also their attempts to communicate with hearing people through the medium of cinema. The coverage confirmed their commitment to oralist methods of communication and desire to publicise deafness as a worthy cause to the public. The use of a written magazine in which to have discussions on film also reaffirms the dominance of text-based media for deaf and hard of hearing people, even when relating to technology with sound as a critical element. The films themselves were not the only concerns of the NID. Assistive technology and promoting deaf people as valued cinema audiences were also prioritised.

5.3. Accessing Cinema

The NID's views on talkies and deaf people were not unanimous throughout the community. For some, talkies were not suitable for deaf people. A letter from F. H. Bell of Skipton was published in *The British Deaf Times* in 1945:

> Sir, - A certain deaf school has spent £300 to equip the school with cinema apparatus, a very generous gesture indeed, but to my gross amazement, I find it is a sound apparatus. Talking pictures at a deaf school where at least 90-95% of the scholars cannot understand talkies even through amplifiers. Surely, this is a gross waste of money from an educational point of view, which is the main purpose it is required to serve.[582]

---

[581] PQBP, 'Mandy', *The Sketch* 217.2814 (13 August 1952), p. 156.
[582] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, 'Our Post Bag – Talking Pictures in Deaf Schools', *The British Deaf Times* 42.499-500 (July-August 1945), p. 75.

Bell wrote that he was writing to the journal to prevent other schools from 'rushing to copy this very bad example of thoughtlessness on the part of the board of governors concerned.'[583] In the following edition, the headmaster of the school, E. S. Greenaway of the Yorkshire Residential School for the Deaf, responded to Bell's letter.[584] He called Bell 'misinformed' and explained that the apparatus was purchased through a private fund set up by parents of pupils at the school, not the governors and that it was for recreational, not educational purposes.[585] He accused Bell of being 'woefully ignorant' of the proportion of deaf students who could use amplifiers and wrote that after a year of use, the school was 'still convinced that we obtained the best apparatus and that the money was well spent.'[586]

Bell and Greenaway's exchange indicates that there was still debate around the use of talkies for deaf people, especially outside of the NID. The NID, however, sought to improve accessibility and confirm cinema as a cultural medium open to deaf and hard of hearing people. In the early 1950s, there were several attempts by the NID and cinema companies to make cinema accessible to deaf and hard of hearing people. One was to caption a talkie film, whilst another, larger initiative was to hold focus groups whereby deaf and hard of hearing cinema audiences would try assistive aids and feedback to cinema sound engineers. These developments show that, championed by the NID, deaf and hard of hearing people were considered a valuable constituency within cinema audiences.

5.3i. Experiments in open captions

In their 1950 Annual Report, the council of the NID wrote that whilst they considered the attempts to bring back silent film 'a retrograde step' they encouraged screenings of captioned foreign language films in deaf organisations.[587] They also wrote that they had been approached by the J. Arthur Rank Organisation, members of which were asking whether sound cinema could be made accessible to deaf people.[588] Historian Harry G. Lang has written on J. Arthur Rank in his history of the American Deaf community's fight for

[583] Ibid.
[584] BL, The British Deaf Times PP.1108.BCD, E. S. Greenaway, 'Our Post Bag – Talking Pictures in Deaf School', *The British Deaf Times* 42.501-2, (September-October 1945), p. 93.
[585] Ibid.
[586] Ibid.
[587] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1950*, 1950, p. 36.
[588] Ibid.

captions.[589] Rank was a flour miller who purchased the Odeon cinema chain, 'controlling the production, distribution and exhibition of films.'[590] It is unclear why the company decided to experiment with captions for deaf people. However, the NID reported that their 'answer was immediate and affirmative' to the offer, putting them in touch with Mr G. A. Foster, the manager of the Hammersmith Gaumont Cinema.[591] Foster had contacted the NID separately after reading a discussion of cinema in *TSW*.[592] The various groups decided that they would experiment with captioning English-language talkie films.[593]

These experiments came to fruition on April 11th, 1950, when a captioned screening of the film *Morning Departure* was held for deaf and hard of hearing people at the Gaumont, Hammersmith.[594] *TSW* printed details on the time of the screening, a synopsis of the film and even bus timetables to encourage deaf and hard of hearing readers to attend.[595] As reported in Harry G. Lang's work, 'John Mill's film Morning Departure was projected normally while a second projector stood by with 350 lantern slides bearing captions. Every fifteen seconds the projectionist changed them, so that the action was flashed on the bottom of the screen.'[596]

The editor of *TSW* dedicated five pages to coverage of the event in the next month's issue.[597] Under the subheading 'Great Expectations' they wrote of the event as 'a red letter day in the annals of entertainment for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.'[598] On one page, they printed copies of headlines from mainstream press outlets, demonstrating that interest extended beyond deaf communities and publications.[599] Over two pages, a feature titled 'The Post Bag' included feedback from attendees of the captioned screening.[600] The journalists made it clear that they welcomed constructive criticism, and although the twelve letters selected for publication were overwhelmingly positive, a few pieces of criticism were printed.[601]

---

[589] Harry G Lang, *Turn on the Words! Deaf Audiences, Captions and the Long Struggle for Access* (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2021).
[590] Ibid., p. 19.
[591] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1950*, 1950, p. 36.
[592] Ibid.
[593] Ibid. p. 37.
[594] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Captioned Films at Last!', *The Silent World* 4.11 (April 1950), p. 323.
[595] Ibid. pp. 336-7
[596] Lang, p. 20.
[597] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Great Expectations', *The Silent World* 4.12 (May 1950), pp. 355-9.
[598] Ibid., p. 355.
[599] Ibid p. 356.
[600] Ibid pp. 358-9.
[601] Ibid.

Mrs C.E. Newell of Putney found that the captions were removed too quickly and would have preferred them at the top of the screen.[602] The Hon. Secretary of the Ealing branch of the Middlesex and Surrey League for the Hard of Hearing enjoyed the film. However, she bemoaned the inconvenient time – 10.30 am – which meant that working members of her organisation could not attend.[603] She acknowledged, however, that deaf and hard of hearing audiences had to fit around the cinema's schedule.[604] Her letter revealed that whilst valued enough for the screening to take place, deaf and hard of hearing audience members would not be catered for at the inconvenience of hearing patrons. Miss Hilda Thewis of the British Association of the Hard of Hearing also enjoyed the screening; however, she wrote that 'when the lettering was on a white background the caption was too faint for me to read.'[605] This highlighted the technical challenges faced by those attempting to make cinema accessible and the difficulties deaf and hard of hearing people had as they tried to engage with films using a visual method.

Most of the feedback in the piece was given by women – eleven out of the twelve responses. This connects to broader histories of film, which record the gendered dynamics of the cultural forum, with women making up a large proportion of cinema audiences.[606] This suggests that as well as cinema creating divides around levels of hearing or deafness, it also constructed ideas of deafness and gender within the British deaf community. By publishing their feedback in their in-house journal, the NID demonstrated the value it placed on the women's feedback. This complicates the narrative of paternalism and paternalistic champions attributed to many deaf charity initiatives of the era.

It is clear from the event coverage in *TSW* that members of the NID hoped that the experimental screening would lead to more experiments. However, as early as April 1951, the editor responded to a letter enquiring about the use of captions in films:

> Unfortunately, although the NID worked out and drafted the captions free of charge, painting them on slides and showing them proved too expensive for the cinema management to repeat the very promising experiment.[607]

---

[602] Ibid., p. 358.
[603] Ibid., p. 358
[604] Ibid.
[605] Ibid., p. 359.
[606] Brad Beaven, 'Going to the cinema: Mass commercial leisure and working class cultures in 1930s Britain', in Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain, ed. by Brett Bebber (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 63-76 (p. 64).
[607] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'What's Your Opinion? Cinema Aids', *The Silent World* 5.11 (April 1951), p. 247.

His comment reveals the work and resources the NID leadership were willing to put into making films accessible, demonstrating the priority placed on cinema for deaf and hard of hearing people in the very early 1950s. Again, it proves that those within the film industry were willing to help deaf and hard of hearing audience members to a certain point but not at great expense.

The scrapbooks compiled by the NID also commemorated the event. Some of the clippings revealed the issues surrounding the experiment. An untitled article clipping from later that year stated that the reaction from the audience of the captioned film had been positive yet:

> It seems, however, that after the initial enthusiasm business-minded managers are chary of introducing these special showings until a sizable audience is promised. Here the organisations for the deaf are facing difficulties; they appreciate that many of the deaf and hard of hearing are not members of their bodies, and no positive number can be obtained for various parts of the country where, possibly, the shows may be held.[608]

This statement reveals that the size of the deaf and hard of hearing cinema audience was unknown and that while showing a willingness to make cinema accessible to deaf and hard of hearing people, financial issues were dominant.

Some of the articles also affirm that hearing audience members always took priority. For example, a *News Chronicle* article on the screening focused on the daughter of a deaf woman who had attended.[609] The journalist began the piece by reporting that nine-year-old Heather Hampton from Surrey 'was a happy girl yesterday – when she went with her deaf mother to a film show.'[610] They continued that she 'was happy because she did not have to stop watching the film to explain the story in sign language to her mother.'[611] Her testimony is an example of the relationality of disability, as her mother had previously utilised her daughters hearing to interact with the sound environment of the cinema, whilst with captions she could engage with the film alone. Concerns about inconveniencing hearing audience members are evident in the piece: the captions are described as 'unobtrusive', and as well as asking for feedback from deaf and hard of hearing audience members, hearing viewers were

---

[608] London, Action on Hearing Loss Library (AOHL), RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Films for the Deaf', Date Unclear
Relocated to: London, UCL Special Collections, RNID Scrapbooks, RNID/3/20/19-22, RNID/3/20/30-3, RNID/3/30/41, RNID/3/20/44.
[609] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *News Chronicle*, 'Testing Film the Deaf Can Enjoy', 12 April 1954.
[610] Ibid.
[611] Ibid.

asked: 'Did the captions irritate you?'[612] Also significant is that the deaf woman at the centre of the article is known only as 'Heather's mother' or 'her deaf mother.'[613] This is despite the fact that she gave a significant quote to the journalist, printed in italics, most likely to denote a translation from sign language.[614]

The desire for captions, however, did not cease. Two letters published in *TSW* in 1954 indicate that for profoundly deaf people, captions were the only option. An R. Cottington of London, who was hearing, wrote:

> May I through your columns enquire to what extent provisions are being made for totally deaf people to see and enjoy films. Cinemas that show Continental films with English sub-titles are few and far between and I feel sure that more would be appreciated by those who can hear like myself, as well as the deaf. I feel that many English films with a few captions would bring infinite pleasure not only to deaf and intelligent people but also to their hearing friends who like to accompany them.[615]

In December of that year, a woman named Miss P. Winser, who identified herself as totally deaf, wrote to the editor in response to R. Cottington's letter to second his desire for captioned films:

> Although my lip reading is passably good, I find it almost impossible to follow more that two-thirds of a film story without having previously read a synopsis of it; the actors seem to turn their backs at the most critical moments […] Is there still no chance of Mr Cottington's suggestion of captioned English films being put into practice by some sympathetic producers?[616]

These letters demonstrate that for profoundly deaf people, captions were very much desired. However, the lack of support from the film industry and other matters occupying the NID meant many went without. It would not be until later in the twentieth century that providing captions for films became a pillar of activism within the D/deaf community, and it remains an ongoing struggle.[617] An area where cinema companies were more willing to invest time and money, however, was in the development of effective assistive hearing aids in British cinemas.

---

[612] Ibid.
[613] Ibid.
[614] Ibid.
[615] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, R. Cottington, 'Readers Forum – Captioned Films', *The Silent World* 9.5 (October 1954), p. 154-5.
[616] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, Miss P. Winser, 'Readers Forum – Captioned Films', *The Silent World* 9.7 (December 1954), p. 222.
[617] Soledad Zárate, *Captioning and Subtitling for d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing Audiences* (London: UCL Press, 2021).

5.3ii. Improving hearing aids in cinemas

Assistive hearing aids had existed in cinemas before 1950. A 1934 advert in the cinema-focused magazine Picture Show read 'Deaf? Ask for an 'Ardente-fitted seat' at the cinema – No Fee!'[618] Ardente was one of the cinema hearing aid models available during the era. An article in the British Medical Journal from 1937 also signifies that technology regarding deafness and access to cinema was being experimented with, as a school for deaf children in Margate was fitted with what they described as a 'cinema deaf-aid system.'[619]

However, a letter from a deaf reader, C. Earthy of Chislehurst, London, published in *TSW* in January 1948, reveals some of the issues surrounding cinema aids. They wrote to the editor:

> Sir,- I notice your film critic, Paul Dehn, asks "what will you miss if you are deaf?" and this makes me wonder whether it is as widely known as it should be that many cinemas have hearing aids fitted in some seats as part of their equipment.
>
> I myself have enjoyed the benefit of these for six or seven years. Originally the aids were supplied without a deposit but now I understand, due to dishonest persons "forgetting" to return them a deposit of 5s. has to be left at the box office.[620]

The editor replied, reminding Earthy that for a 'very large class' of deaf people, 'no sort of hearing aid is of any use.[621] This is of note as most of the NID's discussion, and *TSW*'s cinema coverage, was based around those who could use aids. In their reply, the editor also noted that 'some cinemas want a deposit for the use of an aid, others do not, some still with their eyes fixed on money making, only fit them in the most expensive seats.'[622] Their comment confirms that there was no national consensus on assisting deaf and hard of hearing audience members and that money remained a priority.

In 1951, *TSW* returned to the issue of cinema aids. In January that year, journalists wrote that whilst many cinemas had the technical equipment, 'for some reason or other, the facility is not made full use of, and the NID is trying to find out why.'[623] In the same issue of *TSW*, an article was printed which explained how the cinema aids worked: 'The system

---

[618] PQBP, 'Deaf?', *Picture Show* 30.780 (14 April 1934), p. 27.
[619] The British Medical Journal, 'Cinema Deaf-Aid Installation In A School For The Deaf', *The British Medical Journal* 2.4009 (6 November 1937), p. 927.
[620] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'What's Your Opinion? Aids in Cinemas', *The Silent World* 2.8 (January 1948), p. 25.
[621] Ibid.
[622] Ibid.
[623] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Another Cinema Venture', *The Silent World* 5.8 (January 1951), p. 249.

consists, in essence, of a specially amplified output from the sound-track wired up to a group of seats into which headphones […] can be plugged.'[624]

In January 1951, *TSW* reported that the management of a Gaumont cinema in Bournemouth was to hold a 'hard of hearing party' in their restaurant, which would be a focus group in which hard of hearing people could give feedback on the assistive aids used at the establishment. *TSW* encouraged readers to go and informed them that tickets were available from the NID.[625] The magazine followed up on the story in March 1951, dedicating two pages to how hard of hearing people found the aids and gave feedback to Gaumont and Odeon sound engineers.[626] In May of that year, they wrote that Circuit Management Association Ltd. (the umbrella company of Gaumont and Odeon Cinemas, henceforth CMA) 'have sent us the following list of cinemas in which Hearing Aids are available on request by deaf patrons. […] A scribbled note handed in at the Box Office, or merely the production of this list can get you one.'[627] The list in question was a two-page collection of areas in the country and cinemas that provided aids.[628]

In association with CMA, the NID continued to hold focus groups in which hard of hearing patrons could try the assistive equipment and give feedback.[629] As with the Morning Departure captioned screening, press articles preserved in the NID scrapbooks offer insight into these focus groups. For instance, most occurred between 1951 and 1952 for audiences of 300 to 600 people.[630]

---

[624] Ibid, p. 249.
[625] Ibid.
[626] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Cinema Soiree', *The Silent World* 5.10 (March 1951), pp. 300-301.
[627] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Hearing Aids in Cinemas', *The Silent World* 5.12, (May 1951), pp. 364-5.
[628] Ibid.
[629] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Leeds Learns About Cinema Aids', *The Silent World* 6.2 (July 1951), p. 40.
BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'More Cinema Soirees', *The Silent World* 6.5 (October 1951), pp. 138-9.
[630] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Deaf Aid Campaign Launched', 25 May 1951.
AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Glasgow Citizen*, 'Helping the Deaf', 20 August 1951.
AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Birmingham Weekly*, Ellen Foxon, 'Theatres and Cinemas', 24 March 1952.
AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Kinematograph*, '600 Deaf Hear the Talkies', 27 March 1952.
AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Kinematograph*, '400 CMA Halls Cater for Deaf Patrons', 19 June 1952.

In attendance at many of the screenings were Mr Lilburn, the secretary of the NID, and Mr S. P. Swingler, the Engineer Controller of the Odeon and Gaumont cinemas.[631] According to one article, the initiative came from discussions between the two men. However, it is unclear whether Swingler's involvement was representative of CMAs desire to help and keep the custom of deaf and hard of hearing audiences or whether it came from a personal desire to help.[632] *Kinematograph,* a specialist film publication, reported at the Birmingham session that Swingler 'explained that they were anxious to get to know the requirements of patrons.'[633]

The articles highlight the concerns of CMA that deaf and hard of hearing audience members were under the impression that aids were only available for higher-priced seats.[634] Therefore these screenings were both a way of asking deaf and hard of hearing people for feedback on their equipment and an opportunity for the company to advertise their services. For example, one Birmingham paper reported that equipment was 'available in most modern cinemas today, but insufficiently known to the hard-of-hearing public.'[635] Lilburn was reported in *Kinematograph* to have told the audience in Liverpool, 'It is now the policy of CMA theatre companies to advertise the fact that hearing aids were available free of charge at particular theatres'[636] Once again, however, the commercial interests of the company were apparent. In Birmingham, Swingler is reported to have stated that, 'all classes of patrons were and would be catered for. Care, however, had to be exercised in installing the aids so as to satisfy the requirements of the licensing authorities.'[637]

One aspect of the assistive technology that CMA was eager to receive feedback on was whether patrons would prefer handheld devices or headphones. The audience in Leeds was divided according to one newspaper clipping. Mr J. Foster, the chairman of the Leeds Hard of Hearing Club 'had something to say about the handphone – he felt that it was an added strain to have to hold it to the ear for a couple of hours – he recommended the

---

631 AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Deaf Aid Campaign Launched', 25 May 1951.
632 Ibid.
633 AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Kinematograph*, '600 Deaf Hear the Talkies', 27 March 1952.
634 RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Birmingham Weekly*, Ellen Foxon, 'Theatres and Cinemas', 24 March 1952.
635 Ibid.
636 AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Kinematograph*, '400 CMA Halls Cater for Deaf Patrons', 19 June 1952.
637 AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Kinematograph*, '600 Deaf Hear the Talkies', 27 March 1952.

headphones which could be slipped over the head.'[638] Others, however, reportedly 'said that that type was even less comfortable because of the constant pressure on the head.'[639] A vote was put to the 500 deaf and hard of hearing people in attendance, who preferred the handphone they had used during the screening.[640] The people invited to test the devices and give feedback identified as hard of hearing rather than deaf. Therefore, the feedback given was not representative of what many deaf people may have wanted. This further excluded deaf people from cinema as their opinions were not considered in the design or improvement of cinema hearing aids.

The same article reported on the 'absolute joy' of those in the audience and that 'there were suggestions and criticism from the hall, but the main theme of all the speakers was appreciation, appreciation, deep and sincere.'[641] One attendee who had been deaf for thirty years said, 'Ten years ago I tried a deaf aid in a cinema…it helped a little but it entailed so much strain to get the words clear that I stopped using it. Tonight was an absolute joy.'[642]

The final articles that I found in the NID scrapbooks were on making cinema more accessible to deaf and hard of hearing audience members, however, not through technology. In 1954, the *South London Advertiser* reported that:

> The staff of the Odeon, Camberwell have been supplied with training cards for the deaf and dumb sign language. These cards supplied by the National Institute for the Deaf will give them the necessary training to enable them to 'converse' with patrons who use this system of conversation. This is the first time a theatre staff have been instructed in this sign language to augment service to patrons.[643]

As well as providing further evidence that CMA was trying to win over deaf and hard of hearing patrons, it also highlights that the challenges of engaging with cinema extended beyond the technology for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Both the experiments in captioned film screenings and assistive technology in cinemas prove that there was momentum within the NID and sections of the British film industry to provide access to cinema for deaf and hard of hearing people. The reporting of the events in *TSW* and the collection of press reports in scrapbooks show that value was placed

---

[638] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Deaf Aid Campaign Launched', 25 May 1951.
[639] Ibid.
[640] Ibid.
[641] Ibid.
[642] Ibid.
[643] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *South London Advertiser*, 'To Help the Deaf and Dumb', 21 October 1954.

on film access by at least some within the deaf community. The publicity around these initiatives revealed that technologies, particularly those with sound elements, were also used by the NID to gain attention for their cause.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter problematises the narrative set out in Chapter Five that upon the advent of talkies, cinema was lost to deaf people. Instead, a dividing line emerged between those who could – and wanted to – use assistive technology to engage with sound and those who could or did not want to. This dividing line demonstrates that cinema was a sphere where constructions of later D/deaf identities were created. Cinema was constructed as suitable for a specific proportion of the deaf and hard of hearing community who could get value from it but not for those who could not use the technology available.

The shift in the focus of officials within the NID to prioritise hearing aid users and hard of hearing people, as well as their appeals to hearing people outside of the deaf community, demonstrate their commitment to oralist methods and assimilation into hearing society. This highlights their inclination towards what would later be known as lowercase ‘d’ deaf identities. Simultaneously, this focus alienated profoundly deaf people who could not or did not wish to use hearing aids, preferring sign language. This fed into later D/deaf identities.

The NID’s commitment to sound cinema was evident in their Annual Reports and, from 1946, their magazine, *The Silent World*. Their support of depictions of deafness in films such as *Johnny Belinda* and *Mandy*, which contained oralist and ableist themes, showed that officials were more concerned with raising public awareness of deafness than promoting a sensitive understanding of deafness and the capability of deaf and hard of hearing people. The coverage of these films within the deaf community and outside of it demonstrated the value placed on cinema. For the NID, cinema coverage shaped the cultural forum as being of great use to deaf people and those campaigning for deaf welfare. Nevertheless, mainstream reporting did not always reflect this, with some critics barely focusing on deafness. Others presented deafness as a ‘tragedy’ in the films, thus confirming the NID’s ideas of the films as a way to convey their message to the hearing public.

The prioritisation of assistive aids over captions, as demonstrated by various experiments in the 1950s, again proves the NID’s commitment to hearing aid technology.

The experiments also show that at least one cinema organisation, CMA, was concerned with access to cinema for deaf and hard of hearing people, but within certain limits. For example, access could not come at the expense of hearing audiences' experiences or financial loss for the industry.

The coverage of cinema in the NID Annual Reports, *TSW*, and scrapbooks is useful in revealing how the NID mediated deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with cinema and how they constructed cinema as both accessible and valuable for a certain proportion of the deaf community. The desire to improve assistive aids for this group helped to shape them as a valued part of cinema audiences. However, those not part of the group targeted by the NID were further alienated from the deaf community and hearing society.

From 1946 to 1952, cinema was frequently mentioned in NID Annual Reports and *TSW*. This dwindled, however, as coverage of television and its potential benefit to deaf and hard of hearing people rose. The different approaches to cinema within sections of the deaf community meant that it was challenging to create a public connection between deaf people and the cultural forum, through which they hoped to raise awareness of access issues and deafness as a cause.

In Chapter Six, I argue that the NID tried to create an association between television and deafness, as the Wireless for the Blind Fund had for blindness and radio from the 1920s. Through this, they hoped to legitimise deafness to the hearing public and government as a cause in need of sympathy and funding. In this context, the NID's experiments around cinema indicate that it was being tested as a forum through which they could raise the profile of deaf welfare. By tactically othering deaf and hard of hearing people through technology, the NID hoped to facilitate access and raise awareness. As the 1950s progressed, television, not cinema, became the cultural forum through which they would attempt to emulate the success of Wireless for the Blind.

Chapter 6: Replicating Wireless for the Blind: The Television for the Deaf Fund and accessible broadcasts, 1950-1960

As set out in the previous chapter, the NID promoted cinema, with the use of assistive aids, as a cultural forum deaf and hard of hearing people could and should engage with, whilst the BDA encouraged deaf people to continue watching silent films. However, coverage in archival documents on cinema decreased in the mid-1950s, and the NID became preoccupied with television. In this chapter, I argue that the NID's two initiatives in the 1950s regarding television were both a concerted effort to connect a cultural forum with deafness. Previous chapters have shown the increasingly contested nature of deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with cultural forums, which prevented the NID and other deaf organisations from running campaigns that emulated the success of the Wireless for the Blind Fund. Members of the NID hoped that the government and hearing public would take on board the idea that television was an ideal cultural forum for deaf people and support the campaign and wider matters of deaf welfare. In doing this, the NID mediated how and why deaf people engaged with television and presented deafness as a public issue, continuing the co-construction of both cultural forums and deafness that has been apparent throughout this thesis.

The NID presented television sets and specialised broadcasts as a massive boon for deaf people in the UK. However, the issue of the auditory component of television and a lack of enthusiasm amongst deaf people revealed that their unstated aim was to legitimise deafness as a significant disability and as an issue worthy of public awareness and sympathy. Television became a battleground between the NID and the reluctant hearing public, as the NID tried to present television as an essential cultural forum for deaf people. Later, television became a battleground within Deaf histories, as scholars sought to write the NID's paternalistic television campaigns and oralist methods out of their cultural history.[644] This has become significant from a historiographical standpoint as it has shaped the relationship between television and the deaf community as being largely one of exclusion until the late 20th century. The limited success of the initiatives during the 1950s also reveals that the deaf community, and how they engaged with cultural forums, was too diverse by the mid-twentieth century to be summarised in one public narrative.

---

[644] Martin Atherton, Deafness, *Community and Culture in Britain: Leisure and Cohesion, 1945-1995* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).
Peter W Jackson, *Britain's Deaf Heritage* (Haddington: Pentland Press, 1990), p. 292.

The first initiative by the NID regarding television was the instigation – and ultimate failure – of the 'Television for the Deaf Fund'. Officials within the NID formally announced the fund in 1953, endeavouring to provide free television sets and licences to all deaf organisations. I prove that the campaign was not only about access to media technology, but also a socio-political calculation aimed at legitimising deafness as an issue and gathering public sympathy. The campaign illustrated perceptions of deafness in Britain and the nature of the public attention it received. Studying the socio-political aspects of the campaign contributes to broader histories on the changing cultural perceptions of disability. For example, Julie Andersons has researched how members of the blind community elevated their social position after the First World War, whilst Rebecca Scales has written on the enabling and disabling narratives used by institutional campaigners to promote charity initiatives[645]

Further evidence of the ulterior motives of the NID was their lack of engagement with the aural aspect of television. Drawing on David Hendy's argument that television is an audio-visual technology for which both elements must be considered in conjunction with each other, I examine the significance of the NID ignoring the sound aspect of television.[646] Michelle Hilmes wrote that nation states perceived television as a national medium around which they could construct a national public.[647] The NID promoted television as a way to bring deaf people into civic life and reduce their isolation. Considering Hilmes, I argue that this is further evidence that the NID used the Television for the Deaf Fund as a battleground on which they could fight to legitimise deafness as a significant disability in the eyes of the government and the hearing public.

Throughout the 1950s, representatives of the NID frequently compared Television for the Deaf to the Wireless for the Blind campaign of the 1930s. As established previously in this thesis, blindness was historically considered a worthier cause and more disabling than deafness.[648] I argue that this contributed to the NID's fight for television for deaf people, as

---

[645] Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 7.
Rebecca Scales, *Radio and the Politics of Sound in Interwar France, 1921-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 90
[646] David Hendy, 'Televisions Pre-history: Radio', in *The Television History Book*, ed. by Michele Hilmes (London: British Film Institute, 2003), p. 4.
[647] Michele Hilmes, ed., *The Television History Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), p. 1.
[648] Graeme Gooday and Karen Sayer, *Managing the Experience of Hearing Loss in Britain, 1830-1930* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 48.
Anderson, p. 28.

they sought to put deafness on an even level.[649] Members of the NID weaponised television to further the cause of deafness by presenting deaf people as a minority worthy of sympathy and technology concessions. The ultimate failure of this campaign reinforced the prioritisation of blindness over deafness as a cause. The underwhelming reception of television by deaf people also undermined the NID's assertion that television was an ideal and essential cultural forum for them.

The second development regarding television was the introduction of fifteen-minute monthly programmes adapted for deaf children in June 1952. The BBC attached these to their Sunday evening *Children's Hour* broadcasts. David Oswell has written on the development of the child television audience and the BBC's assessment of television as a tool for children's academic, social and religious education.[650] In this chapter, I develop this by exploring the minority television audience of deaf children. I analyse the NID and BBC's aims and why children's television was made accessible. I suggest that this decision to only adapt simple programmes aimed at children rather than more complex broadcasts exposed the low expectations of deaf people and paternalistic, patronising attitudes towards the deaf community. Reactions to the programmes within the deaf community also indicated the roots of what would become very separate D/deaf identities in the twentieth century. Evidence of this is the omission of television before the 1970s in works by historians of Deaf culture, such as Peter Jackson and Martin Atherton.[651]

Some deaf and hard of hearing people were interested in engaging with television in the 1950s, and I have uncovered debates around the proposed uses of television within the deaf community. This engagement, however, was heavily mediated by the NID as they sought to recreate the success of the Wireless for the Blind Fund. They aimed to provide people with access to a cultural forum and raise awareness of broader deaf issues through their campaign. They constructed television as an ideal cultural forum for deaf people whilst simultaneously constructing deaf people as disabled and in need of sympathy. Unlike radio earlier in the century, however, the NID was not able to create a singular narrative around deaf people's engagement with a cultural forum, as divisions and diversity within the deaf

---

[649] Ibid.

[650] David Oswell, 'Early Children's Broadcasting in Britain: Programming for a Liberal Democracy', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18 (1998), 375-393 (p. 375).
David Oswell, *Television, childhood, and the home: a history of the making of the child television audience in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

[651] Atherton, (2012).
Jackson, p. 292.

community and their differing methods of engagement – as evidenced in their interactions with cinema – became increasingly apparent.

6.1. Early ideas around television and the deaf community

As set out in the introduction of this thesis, the BBC began a limited television broadcasting schedule before the Second World War which was halted during the conflict. In 1946, they resumed their services, and television became increasingly popular in Britain, especially in the early 1950s.[652]

In 1935, the *Deaf Quarterly News* (*DQN*) published an article by J. Ellis, musing on the possibilities of television for deaf people.[653] Ellis described engagement with television as 'seeing in' and set out hopes that sets would become affordable for most households. They wrote that 'pure visual events' such as the Derby National or Wembley Cup would be of great benefit to deaf people.[654] However, they were also realistic about the medium, writing that 'sound will still be essential'.[655] Nevertheless, Ellis proclaimed themselves to be an optimist, listing the benefits of television, such as engagement with religious programming and political events. They suggested that signed programming would be a possibility: 'the thrill of tuning in each evening to Leslie Edwards or some other expert finger speller and signer, broadcasting a summary of the day's news at home and abroad, in the half-hour given over to the deaf by the broadcasting authorities.'[656] This notion was indeed optimistic as the BBC had yet to start broadcasting, and regular signed programming would not exist until the 1980s.[657]

Ellis wrote of his hopes for deaf people's engagement with television, which would reflect those of the NID in the 1950s:

> Passing on news and events in the deaf world to all deaf "seers-in"; uniting the deaf who at present are merely interested in their own small circle or Mission centre and have no conception of the welfare of the deaf as a representative body of people;

---

[652] Glen Creeber, 'The Origins of Public Service Broadcasting' in *The Television History Book*, ed. by Michele Hilmes (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 23-34, p. 34.
[653] London, The British Library (BL), The Deaf Quarterly News, P.P.1108.e., J. Ellis, 'Television, The Possibilities for the Deaf', *The Deaf Quarterly News* 121, (April, May, June 1935), pp. 4-5.
[654] Ibid., p. 4.
[655] Ibid., p. 5.
[656] Ibid.
[657] BBC, '9 Ways Life Has Changed for Deaf People, *BBC* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/ZgRczbRTdsJ4tdWRKTcfFx/9-ways-life-has-changed-for-deaf-people> [accessed 6 December 2022].

> merging them into a powerful body of people under one leadership; eliminating the present barrier of parochialism which is continually hindering the cause of the deaf by its aloofness and isolation. […] "What an optimist"! You say […] "What a Fairy Tale"! Of course; but remember, some people believe in fairies.[658]

Ellis's words demonstrated how for some, there was hope that television would help the deaf community gain traction as the blind community had, aided by such initiatives as the Wireless for the Blind Fund. This rhetoric of high ambitions for how deaf people would engage with television was reflected in the NID's television initiatives. However, unlike Ellis, who acknowledges the audio element and suggested alternative, deaf-specific programming, the NID ignored the sound element and used oralist methods such as lipreading when advising on accessible broadcasts.

Post-war, as BBC television broadcasting resumed and increased, others within the deaf community began to ponder the potential uses of television. Within the BFI archives, I found a typed study by a deaf man, Michael King-Beer.[659] In 1949, King-Beer published a letter in *The Radio Times*, asking deaf television viewers to give him 'their personal opinions of television as it affected their lives as deaf persons.'[660] King-Beer then used the thirty responses he received in his personal study. King-Beer began by categorising types of deafness as:

1. Those who are partially deaf, or hard of hearing
2. Those who are totally deaf and unable to lip-read
3. Those who are deaf and able to lip-read[661]

He identified as a member of the third group and suggested that they, especially those who use assistive aids, were the best served by television.[662] The categorisation of deaf people around the topic of television demonstrated the co-construction of both deafness and the forum. It revealed limitations to its use that were not highlighted by the NID later.

In another passage, King-Beer confirms my assumption that some regarded television in the deaf community as a solution to issues presented by other cultural forums:

---

[658] BL, The Deaf Quarterly News, P.P.1108.e., J. Ellis, 'Television, The Possibilities for the Deaf', *The Deaf Quarterly News* 121, (April, May, June 1935), p. 5.
[659] London, British Film Institute Reuben Library, BFI Conservation centre Multi-Media Vaults KING-BEER, Michael 654.197:362.42, Michael King-Beer, Television and the Deaf – A Private Research Undertaken by Michael King-Beer, B.Sc., F.G.S., 27th March 1949.
[660] Ibid., p. 1.
[661] Ibid., p. 2.
[662] Ibid.

> In the cinema, a deaf person has some obstacles in the way of his enjoyment of the film. The lip-reader misses the dialogue each time an actor is "cut" out of a scene before the end of his speaking part, and it is seldom easy to pick up the threads of the story again. If a person uses a hearing aid in the cinema, the instrument picks up and magnifies the audience noise from around the listener, and this often drowns out the soundtrack of the film itself.[663]

King-Beer suggested that actors do not get 'cut away' on television and that using headphones at home was more efficient than hearing aids in a public area.[664] For televised plays, he suggested that the BBC could offer synopses for deaf and hard of hearing people to read in advance.[665] He concluded:

> Ninety minutes of self-forgetfulness in the evening, while watching a television programme, can cause a great difference in the lives of deaf people, making them happier and less resentful of their hearing losses. For this reason and others, future generations may come to regard the advent of television as a great milestone of progress in the welfare of the deaf.[666]

Both above sources show huge amounts of optimism within the deaf community regarding how deaf people might engage with television and its benefits. The NID furthered these early rumblings of interest as they set out to provide access to deaf people.

6.2. The NID Television for the Deaf Fund

In the early 1950s, local press reported that 'Delegates of the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Association for the Hard of Hearing were told at their annual meeting […] that provision of free television sets to severely deaf people was being sought.'[667] The article also revealed that a new sub-committee created by the NID would be 'urging [that] the Postmaster-General should grant free television licences for deaf people.'[668] *The Nottingham Guardian* also reported that 'when television began to develop so rapidly after the war […] [the NID] saw in the medium great possibilities for deaf people all over the country.'[669] Through their mouthpiece, *The Silent World* (*TSW*), the NID stated in February 1953 that

---

[663] Ibid., p. 3.
[664] Ibid.
[665] Ibid., p. 5.
[666] Ibid., p. 6.
[667] London, Action on Hearing Loss Library (AOHL), RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, Date and Title Unclear
Relocated to: London, UCL Special Collections, RNID Scrapbooks, RNID/3/20/19-22, RNID/3/20/30-3, RNID/3/30/41, RNID/3/20/44.
[668] Ibid.
[669] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Nottingham Guardian*, 'TV for Deaf', 30 January 1953.

'one of the dearest ambitions the NID has for ameliorating the lot of the deaf and hard of hearing, is to see every Home, Institute, School and Club equipped with Television receivers.'[670] *The Radio Times*, a popular mainstream publication, wrote in November 1952 that 'among those who work for the deaf and dumb it is generally agreed that the television could be one of the finest thing that has happened for the entertainment of the deaf'.[671] The editor of *TSW* also claimed that 'the NID is convinced that nothing more useful, more conductive to the happiness and further education of the deaf could be provided at the present time than television sets.'[672]

To achieve their aims, the NID 'were granted a special B.B.C. Week's Good Cause Appeal on Sunday, February 8th 1953, for the purpose of creating a separate fund.'[673] This radio appeal marked the formalisation of the campaign, where the NID publicly presented television as a cultural forum of great importance to deaf and hard of hearing people. Robert Stephenson, Superintendent of the Sheffield Association for the Adult Deaf and Dumb, wrote an open letter to *The Sheffield Telegraph* on his desire to enact this campaign nationally. He stated that 'to make an appeal of this nature a success we need the full co-operation of every organisation which can possibly help us.'[674] He also emphasised the high expectations of the duration of the campaign: 'the appeal will not end with the broadcast and every effort will be made […] to continue it […] as soon as the results of the appeal are known, we shall be circulating organisations for the deaf and partially deaf regarding the operation of the scheme.'[675]

The NID made another appeal for donations to the fund on television itself during the prime New Year's Day BBC slot on January 1st, 1956, demonstrating that it remained a significant area of activity for the NID in the years following the initiation of the fund.[676] *TSW* continued to emphasise the benefits of television for deaf people. Pictures and articles of deaf organisations receiving television sets through the fund occasionally appeared in editions across the period, particularly 1956-1957.[677] The NID Annual Reports, however,

---

[670] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'A BBC Appeal' *The Silent World* 7.9 (February 1953), p. 263.
[671] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Radio Times*, 'For the Deaf', 14 November 1952.
[672] Ibid.
[673] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Cardiff Western Mail*, 'BBC appeal to give deaf TV sets', 5 February 1952.
[674] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Sheffield Telegraph*, 'TV For The Deaf', 31 January 1953.
[675] Ibid.
[676] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Thank You BBC' *The Silent World* 10.9 (February 1956), p. 259.
[677] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Deaf Listening', *The Silent World* 13.9 (February 1959), p. 259.
BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Television for the Deaf' *The Silent World* 10.11 (April 1956), p. 345.
BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Television for the Deaf' *The Silent World* 11.8 (January 1957), p. 238.

presented a far more negative overview of the campaign. The institution regularly described the fund as being 'exhausted' due to a lack of donations.[678] Finally, in 1961, it was announced: 'Today Television for the Deaf as a scheme is moribund [failing] for lack of support.'[679]

I argue that the motivation behind the Television for the Deaf Fund was a benevolent desire to provide a cultural forum to deaf people, but also an attempt by the NID to construct deafness as a significant disability in need of support. This is not unique to this campaign; for example, Julie Anderson and Rebecca Scales write of how charitable institutions and organisations tried to present various disabilities in this way to the general, able-bodied public.[680]

The notion of television as compensation for deaf people arose in several articles from the early 1950s that were placed in NID scrapbooks. *The South Wales Echo* wrote in 1951 that 'sound broadcasts, a comfort for the blind, are a total loss to the deaf, but television can compensate with special programmes based on visual appeal.'[681] Two years later, the *Birmingham Post* reported that the NID 'believes that television can replace many of the joys lost by the deaf, such as church services, theatres, concerts and variety.'[682] Again, this emphasised the challenges of deafness in an attempt to increase public sympathy. It also suggested that the development of radio was disabling for deaf people, as it further excluded them. In June 1953, *TSW* printed the transcript of presenter Jeanne Heal's radio broadcast on behalf of the Television for the Deaf Fund. In it, Heal beseeched the listening audience to imagine being unable to hear and to:

> Consider for one brief moment the forgotten two and a half million people in this country…For those totally deaf there is no radio, no music, no sound at the cinema, or

---

BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Television for the Deaf' *The Silent World* 11.9 (February 1957), p. 262.
BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Television for the Deaf' *The Silent World* 11.11 (April 1957), pp. 336-338.

[678] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1955*, 1955, p. 7.
BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1958*, 1958, p. 6.

[679] AOHL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1961*, 1961, p. 24.
Accessed in the former Action on Hearing Loss Library, London. A copy of this document can be found in Oxford, The Bodleian Library, Per. 263 d.53 (1960-1961), N10407891.

[680] Anderson, p. 7.
Scales, p. 90.

[681] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *South Wales Echo*, 'They Want TV Sub Titles', 16 November 1951.

[682] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Birmingham Post*, 'TV for the Deaf', 4 February 1953.

> the seaside, or in the country. For the rest of the two and a half million there is the constant strain of listening and watching. The feeling of always being left out. Deafness is terribly lonely…The deaf cannot hear, but they can see. It's their one compensation.[683]

A primary argument of the campaign was that television could integrate deaf people into general society. This corresponds with historian Michele Hilmes' assertion that the state considered television a national medium that could create a national audience in the 1950s.[684] During the same period, the NID used this notion to construct a deaf audience constituency that needed to be brought into this national audience. *The Nottingham Journal* wrote in 1951 that deaf children with access to television at their specialist school had their horizons broadened: 'Broadcasts of news and outside events have helped to maintain and interest in life outside the school.'[685] In Yorkshire, the Chairman of the Executive Committee for the York Deaf and Dumb Society, Mr J. W. Barnes, said of deaf individuals, 'these people live in a world of their own', and that television sets should have been installed in all deaf institutes as a 'special consideration' to ease their 'very great affliction.'[686]

Additionally, the NID and its volunteers framed television as a way to reduce the isolation of deaf people on a national and domestic level. NID chairman Dr. R. Scott. Stevenson, in a speech at the presentation of a television set to the Bath Home for Deaf Women in September 1952, stated that deaf people were 'shut off from many of the pleasures of life' and that the women of the home would 'especially enjoy the coronation procession' of Elizabeth II. Television was also held up to be a method of improving the lives of deaf people living in family homes, as specially commissioned programmes for deaf people could 'bring deaf people back into the family circle.'[687] Deaf *TSW* journalist W. Alford agreed, writing in 1955 that television helped 'avoid the 'left out' feeling that comes to even the happiest person – that is the feeling that gives the deaf or hard of hearing the 'withdrawn' look.'[688] He appealed for sympathy for deaf people, pressing that:

---

[683] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, Jeanne Heal, 'Appeal on behalf of the Television Fund of the National Institute for the Deaf', *The Silent World* 7.9 (February 1953), p. 306.
[684] Hilmes, p. 1.
[685] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Nottingham Journal*, 'Television is fostering interest in deaf children', 9 May 1951.
[686] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Yorkshire Evening Press*, 'TV sets urged for Deaf and Dumb', 20 April 1951.
[687] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Manchester Evening News*, 'TV Programmes Can Aid The Deaf', 20 October 1951.
[688] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, W. Alford, 'Television for the Deaf', *The Silent World* 10.4 (September 1955), p. 111.

> Living in the country with aged parents, television is my one contact with *live* entertainment. Inanimate beauty is not enough, words and pictures have their place, but the feeling of life and being part of it, brought by television, should be part of it.[689]

Therefore, the NID and press portrayed television as a communicative, connecting forum required to integrate deaf people into mainstream society and families, reducing their isolation. By advocating bringing deaf people into the mainstream through television, they attempted to use television to legitimise deafness as a disability.

The terminology journalists used in the early and mid-1950s in reporting on the campaign was indicative of the meaning placed on television for the deaf. By speaking and writing of deafness as a terrible affliction from which individuals need 'saving' – in this scenario through television – deaf people were further disabled through their construction as people with little agency or capability.Many articles wrote of the desire of campaigners that all schools, institutes and clubs be 'equipped' with television sets.[690] The use of 'equip' suggested that television was a necessary cultural forum for deaf people. I argue that this was a deliberate campaign method whereby the NID used technological language to capture public sympathy, presenting television as a necessity for deaf people rather than a luxury. The terminology used by the NID and journalists created a highly negative perception of deafness.

A striking feature of the campaign to provide deaf people with televisions was the consistent references to the Wireless for the Blind campaign of the 1930s, highlighting the disabling influence of radio on deaf people and the lack of sympathy they received compared to the blind community. I reveal, however, that the campaign did not garner similar support or status. A radio appeal by the NID in February 1953 to mark the campaign's official launch stated that they wanted to give deaf people 'this magic window into the world, just as the blind were given ears over the world through 'Wireless for the Blind'.'[691] They repeated the comparison in the summer of that year, with an article in *TSW* stating that 'as the world was poured into the ears of the blind when sound broadcasting began, so it can now pass before the eyes of the deaf.'[692] The 'Radio Doctor', an audiologist who wrote advice in *TSW*, made a BBC radio appeal for the cause of blindness in 1950, noting that 'I'm afraid it's true that deafness is all too often regarded as a joke and a nuisance by those who have never suffered

---

[689] Ibid.
[690] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Nottingham Evening Post*, 'Wireless Whispers', Day and Month Unclear, 1953.
[691] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Notes and News', *The Silent World* 7.8 (January 1953), p. 248.
[692] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'A New Volume', *The Silent World* 8.1 (June 1953), p. 3.

it. By the Blind everyone's heart is touched – and rightly so – but deafness, no.'[693] This revealed that the NID knew they had to be cautious in complaining about the attention and sympathy blindness received, yet still wanted to draw the public's attention to the lack of compassion shown towards deaf people. I argue that by creating and promoting the fund, the NID were using new technologies to make this case in a way that would be well received by the hearing public.

Within the archival sources, officials in the deaf community frequently referred to radio and its exclusionary impact on deaf people. Barnes, the chair of the Executive Committee for the York and District Deaf and Dumb Society, stated in 1951, 'we often find that people are sympathetic to a blind man, but to be without the sound of wireless, the birds or even the sound of their own children is a very great affliction.'[694] Here the perceived imbalance of sympathy shown towards blind individuals is directly associated with radio. Barnes also highlighted the importance of domestic technology for people with disabilities and that deaf people did not yet have their equivalent of wireless for the blind. He placed deafness on a par with blindness as a debilitating disability to campaign for concessions for deaf people. In the same year, the president of the Halifax and District Deaf and Dumb Association furthered these ideas in the *Halifax Weekly Courier*. In trying to convey the necessity of providing deaf people with televisions, he stated, 'Do you realise what television can mean for the deaf and dumb? Deaf and Dumb people live in a world of perpetual silence and are the most isolated and most seriously handicapped class of the community.' He continued to list audio experiences, including listening to the wireless, that deaf people are deprived of before finishing 'but they can see pictures on the screen and obtain a measure of happiness and instruction thereby.'[695]

The Liverpool Post reported Pastor D. Russell MacFarlane, organising secretary of the Chester and North Wales Deaf and Dumb Society, to have stated, 'When a blind person walks down the street he is an advertisement of himself, but when a deaf person goes down the street, no one knows – and I sometimes think no one cares.'[696] Here he accredits the

[693] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'The 'Radio Doctor Broadcasts', *The Silent World* 5.6 (November 1950), pp. 164-165.
[694] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Yorkshire Evening Press*, 'TV sets urged for Deaf and Dumb', 20 April 1951.
[695] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Halifax Weekly Courier*, 'No songs of birds', 18 October 1951
[696] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Liverpool Post*, 'TV A Boon to Deaf and Dumb', 19 January 1953.

invisibility of deafness as causing the lack of support and sympathy received by deaf people. MacFarlane continued, 'Since the National Assistance Act came into force our eyes have been opened, and I hope our hearts, to those who are not able to speak or even listen to the wireless.'[697] This again demonstrated an attempt to legitimise deafness as a disability that deserved attention and aid. Additionally, by selecting the inability to speak alongside the inability to listen to the wireless, he emphasised the disadvantage deaf people faced in their exclusion from cultural forums and the possibility that this could be rectified through television access.

Public institutions also reinforced the disparity in sympathy shown towards deafness compared to blindness. In November 1955, the NID applauded the BBC for allotting them one of the thrice-monthly television spots the BBC gave to charities to make appeals to the public.[698] However, despite the BBC allocating them a prime New Year's Day slot they lamented it as

> unfortunate that a week earlier, on Christmas Day, at the greatest charity moment of the year, appeals will be broadcast on both sound and television for the already wealthy 'Wireless for the Blind' fund, and the most impulsive in giving will probably find they have sent all they can spare to that. But it is unkind to criticise.[699]

This occurrence demonstrates that the NID did not believe that deafness was considered as serious a condition or as worthy of sympathy as blindness, a sentiment reinforced by the BBC's scheduling choices.

Members of Parliament also debated concessions on television sets and licences for deaf people in the House of Commons in 1951 before the Television for the Deaf Fund's creation. *The British Deaf Times* (*BDT*) printed a transcript of the debate in a journal issue. In response to the suggestion, Chancellor of the Exchequer Mr Gaitskell stated that he had:

> looked at it, and we all have sympathy with those totally deaf people, but I am bound to say that I cannot put their claims above those of many other categories of people, including the bed-ridden persons and others, who might have an equal claim for exemption if we were to give it to the deaf.[700]

---

[697] Ibid.
[698] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'A Milestone in Appeals', *The Silent World* 10.6 (November 1955), p. 163.
[699] Ibid.
[700] BL, The British Deaf Times, PP. 1108.BCD, 'Questions in the House of Commons', *The British Deaf Times* 49.573-74 (September-October 1951), p. 73.

This is despite the government having already granted concessions for blind people's access to radio, which could also have benefitted people with other disabilities. It is unsurprising then that the Television for the Deaf Fund, created two years after this debate, emphasised the difficulties of gathering sympathy and support for deafness from institutions such as the BBC and Parliament.

Despite the NID's attempts to draw parallels between Television for the Deaf and Wireless for the Blind, they failed to accumulate sympathy and support. Early in the campaign, a 1952 article in the *Bradford Telegraph* strongly indicated the lack of sympathy and desire to aid the provision of television for deaf people. It stated that there was 'no response' to an appeal for funds to provide television to a local deaf institute.[701] This was a massive departure from the reception of the Wireless for the Blind campaign, as *the Lancaster Evening Post* stated, 'years ago we were impressed by the great boon that sound radio was proving to the blind. Appeals, national and local, to provide blind people with wireless sets met with a ready and generous response.'[702] In March 1958, *TSW* reported that the Television for the Deaf Fund had been 'ticking over mildly but never spectacularly' and that 'when one thinks of the crashing success of the Wireless for the Blind Fund, begun in the early days of radio, Television for the Deaf is a very poor second.'[703] The article stated that 'the need is greater' for deaf people to have televisions, claiming that deaf-blind people often said that 'their silence is worse than their darkness.'[704]

There has been a tendency within histories of radio and television to portray television as a purely visual medium, as this constructs it as a valuable alternative to the aural radio.[705] This has hindered television history, as sound has always been a feature of the cultural forum. In their campaigning for the Television for the Deaf Fund, the NID almost wholly neglected the sound element of television. In 1953, *The Yorkshire Observer* reported that 'television as a medium of entertainment can be followed by the totally deaf and the hard of hearing as so many of its programmes are entirely visual.'[706] The article continued to list television

---

[701] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Bradford Telegraph*, 'A Boon To The Deaf', 2 January 1952.
[702] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Lancaster Evening Post*, 'TV-For-The-Deaf Fund is Planned', 9 January 1953.
[703] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Money to View', *The Silent World* 12.10 (March 1958), p. 291.
[704] Ibid.
[705] David Hendy, 'Televisions Pre-history: Radio', in *The Television History Book*, ed. by Michele Hilmes (London: British Film Institute, 2003), p. 2.
[706] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Yorkshire Observer*, 'Television from Church', 4 February 1953.

broadcasts that deaf people could enjoy, such as sports, magicians and dance.[707] Journalists and NID representatives rarely mentioned that all broadcasts included soundtracks that many deaf people could not experience. Further, the inaccessibility of some soundtracks for lipreading, such as commentaries or off-screen announcements, would have made some broadcasts almost impossible to follow for severely deaf people.

Two articles in mid-1952, from *The Oldham Evening Chronicle* and *Cambridge Daily News*, served as rare examples of any scepticism regarding television's suitability for deaf people: 'Television itself is obviously more attractive to the deaf than radio. It has at least some visual content, but will not be of much value until some equivalent of hearing aids, as at present used in cinemas, can be invented.'[708] *TSW*, the official journal of the NID, did caveat the overwhelmingly positive impressions reported in newspapers. In a 1950 article, a contributor wrote, 'One thing the deaf and their friends are sometimes inclined to overlook is that sound is as indispensable a part of television as it is of the modern cinema. TV is not by any means a purely visual form of entertainment.'[709]

The journal also included a transcript of a 1952 question-and-answer session on television at a radio exhibition in Earls Court, London. When asked whether television was an ideal entertainment for the deaf, the NID representative answered that it was 'as near ideal as any entertainment today because its interest is so largely visual.'[710] When this was followed by a question on whether television was entirely visual, he answered, 'No, of course not. It is combined sound and picture. But you are forgiven for asking. Many deaf people do.'[711] This patronising attitude and insistence that sound was not an issue suggested that the NID was keen to reduce the attention paid to the sound element of the cultural forum. Rev. T. H. Sutcliff, who performed signed church services for deaf people, warned, 'Many jump to the conclusion that a television broadcast is ideal entertainment for the totally deaf. But this is not necessarily so, for the broadcast is not entirely visual but is a mixture of pictures and sound.'[712] He continued that deaf people struggled to make out 'meaningful' speech on

---

[707] Ibid.
[708] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Oldham Evening Chronicle*, 'Deaf-aids', 5 June 1952. AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Cambridge Daily News*, 'Deaf-Aids', 30 May 1952.
[709] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Television…"The Pictures" By Your Fireside' *The Silent World* 5.4 (September 1950), p. 110.
[710] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Television for the Deaf' *The Silent World* 7.5 (October 1952), p. 136.
[711] Ibid.
[712] BL, The British Deaf News PP.1108.bcl, TH Sutcliffe, 'Television and the Deaf', *British Deaf News* 1.2. (March-April 1955), p. 46.

television through lipreading and that 'plays often cannot be followed.'[713] *British Deaf News* (*BDN*), a journal distinct from the NID, rarely reported on television but did publish Sutcliff's statements. This is significant as it highlights the deliberate omission of the issue of sound in publications directly related to the institution.

The reluctance of the NID to acknowledge the obstacles deaf people encountered when engaging with television strengthens my argument that the television for the deaf campaign was more of a venture in legitimising deafness and gaining public sympathy rather than providing an ideal cultural forum to a group in need. The NID aimed to present television as a hugely enabling cultural forum for deaf people; however, the sound element was exclusionary. Later Deaf cultural histories did not acknowledge the history of deafness and television until the use of methods that replaced sound and speech, such as in-depth subtitles and sign language.

6.3. BBC *Children's Hour* accessible broadcasts

Running parallel to the Television for the Deaf campaign was the development of a monthly television programme for deaf children. The BBC broadcast the first episode on the 13th of June 1952 as a segment at the end of *Children's Hour*. Historians have asserted that the BBC perceived *Children's Hour*, which began as a radio programme in the 1940s, as a new tool to educate the child audience. From 1950, they aired regular programming for children every Sunday afternoon.[714] Two years later, programming explicitly produced to be accessible to deaf children was developed. This section will explore the relationship between the BBC and NID when creating the *Children's Hour* programmes, the conflicting reports on the show's aim, and the methods used to try to produce a television show accessible to deaf children.

Popular television personality Jasmine Bligh presented the first programme.[715] The NID's official journal *TSW* gave the new shows a vast amount of coverage, to the extent that the editor felt he had to defend the decision to cover the development so extensively at the

---

[713] Ibid.
[714] Oswell, 'Early Children's Broadcasting in Britain', p. 375.
D. Oswell, *Television, Childhood, and the Home*, p. 1.
Stephen G Parker, 'Teach them to pray Auntie: "Children's hour prayers" at the BBC, 1940 – 1961', *History of Education*, 39 (2010), 659–676 (pp. 659).
[715] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Notes and News…From Everywhere', *The Silent World* 6.12 (May 1952), p. 376.

beginning of the journal's eighth volume.[716] A *TSW* article in the month of the first broadcast claimed that the show would be experimental and primarily for entertainment; however, it did have the potential to aid deaf children's lipreading and numeracy skills.[717] The same article also announced that the journal was introducing pages for children to coincide with the beginning of the broadcasts.[718] It described the series as 'experimental' and would consist of 'captioned stories'.[719] These would be told through close-ups of presenters speaking for lipreading, then a subtitle and finally, the picture both were referring to would appear.[720]

Unlike modern methods of making television accessible, in the early 1950s, the BBC showed all methods separately and chronologically. As this section will explore, there were teething problems with the programmes. However, as early as 1953, *TSW* reported that the broadcasts 'seem to have settled down into a widely appreciated routine.'[721] The journal celebrated the second and fifth anniversaries of the first broadcast with special articles.[722] Additionally, there was a fractional broadening of television adapted to deaf people. For example, televised signed church services in 1957 and 1959, and the dissemination of play scripts before broadcast for deaf people in 1959.[723] Journals not affiliated with the NID did not pay particular attention to these developments. Between 1950-1960, *BDT* did not cover television shows for deaf people at all; *BDN* did mention the televised signed church services, but there was nothing on the children's broadcasts.[724] Unsurprisingly, the NID itself promoted both the children's broadcasts and their involvement in developing them, devoting a two-page spread to it in their 50th anniversary Annual Report and boasting that some of the shows had been broadcast overseas in Australia, New Zealand and the United States.[725] Despite the success of these programmes as presented in the sources, these programmes have

---

[716] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'A New Volume', *The Silent World* 8.1 (June 1953), p. 3.
[717] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Television for Deaf Children' *The Silent World* 7.1 (June 1952), p. 15.
[718] Ibid.
[719] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Notes and News…From Everywhere', *The Silent World* 6.12 (May 1952), p. 376.
[720] Ibid.
[721] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Welcome to 1953', *The Silent World* 7.8 (January 1953), p. 231.
[722] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, Ursula Eason, 'The Second Anniversary of Television for Deaf Children', *The Silent World* 9.1 (June 1954), pp. 11-12.
[723] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Notes and News', *The Silent World* 11.11 (April 1957), p. 344.
BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'A Service for the Deaf', *The Silent World* 14.3 (October 1959), pp. 128-131.
BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'TV Serials', *The Silent World* 12.12 (May 1958), pp. 282-285.
BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'More about viewing', *The Silent World* 13.12 (May 1959), p. 355.
[724] BL, The British Deaf News PP.1108.bcl, 'BBC Television Service for the Deaf', *British Deaf News* 1.2 (March-April 1955), pp. 44-47.
[725] AOHL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1961*, 1961, pp. 22-24.

not appeared in D/deaf histories of television. This section will explore some of the reasons why this has occurred.

A recurring theme in the sources is the conflicting accounts of how accessible children's programmes came into being. In her work on the amplified telephone, Coreen McGuire has written on how an institution, the Post Office, claimed credit for developing technology for deaf people.[726] Similarly, the BBC and NID vied for credit for spearheading the development of shows for deaf children, showing an increased awareness of deaf people as a valued section of the television viewing audience. Both framed television as ideally suited for the deaf community whilst simultaneously negatively presenting deaf people, conveying narratives of them as profoundly disabled and suffering.

The NID presented itself as the instigator of the children's programmes. In May 1952, the *Bath Weekly Chronicle* reported on the annual meeting of the Somerset Diocesan Mission to the Deaf and Dumb.[727] They quoted Mr G. Lilburn, the secretary of the NID who had also been involved in the initiative to improve assistive aids in cinemas, from a speech he gave on the NID's attempts to persuade the BBC to produce television programmes accessible to deaf viewers. He spoke of the 'difficulties' he had encountered when lobbying the BBC:

> For two years we have been trying to get in the front door, the back door, or even the window of B.B.C. Television. At first we were received politely, but it was obvious we would not make any progress. We persisted in trying and on one occasion were slung out on our ears.[728]

He continued to say that the BBC's attitude towards the endeavour changed dramatically following a meeting between the company's executives and some deaf people: 'Within 48 hours of their interview, I was summoned to see them. They told me they were going to do something about television for the deaf.'[729] In this, he painted himself as a heroic advocate for deaf people and the NID as a militant force for deaf rights, constructing deaf people as reliant on heroic figures such as himself to progress.

Other articles reported vastly different scenarios of the BBC's involvement in creating the shows in the early 1950s. *The Daily Mirror* argued that the impetus to develop a

---

[726] Coreen McGuire, 'Inventing Amplified Telephony: The Co-Creation of Aural Technology and Disability', in *Rethinking Modern Prosthesis in Anglo-American Commodity Cultures, 1820-1939,* ed. by Claire L Jones (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 70-90 (pp. 86).
[727] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Bath Weekly Chronicle*, '"TV For The Deaf" Is New Slogan – Television Shown at Bath Meeting', 3 May 1952.
[728] Ibid.
[729] Ibid.

television show for deaf children began within the BBC itself, quoting Miss Freda Lingstrom, the head of children's television at the BBC. She claimed that a colleague had suggested the idea 'to cater for deaf and dumb children' and that 'this stimulated a plan in my own mind on how to prepare a programme for handicapped children.'[730] In June 1954, BBC producer Ursula Eason wrote an article in *TSW* to commemorate the second anniversary of the first broadcast.[731] In it, she reiterated that the shows had been the brainchild of Freda Lingstrom, who despite the fact that producing broadcasts for such a small minority audience 'could not be easily justified,' had 'pressed on.'[732] Ursula Eason herself was praised by *TSW* in August 1955 when she became assistant head of children's television at the BBC. She was replaced as a producer on many programmes; however, she specially requested to remain a producer of the broadcasts for deaf children.[733]

The NID's relationship with the BBC was grateful but tenuous in the mid-1950s. For example, in a 1956 article entitled 'Thank you BBC', *TSW* reported that 'of all the great National bodies, none have shown such an active sympathy and help for the deaf' as the BBC.[734] The journal produced this article after the BBC had granted the NID a slot to make a television appeal for donations. The following year the journal lamented that neither the BBC nor commercial television showed any signs of trying to make television more accessible for deaf people; however, it added at the end that they should be grateful for the *Children's Hour* broadcasts and that deaf adults should stick to watching captioned European cinema.[735] This correlates with mainstream television history, as the medium depended on drawing in huge audience numbers, and 'even so-called minority programming' had to appeal to a mass audience.[736] The recognition of a deaf audience by the BBC was a positive development. However, the focus remained on children. I argue that this was partly due to limited scheduling time and the BBC being unwilling to give over more than a monthly slot to the deaf community, but also that during this period, a deaf person's success was measured by their ability to use oralist methods of communication, such as lipreading or speech. By engaging with children and these methods, the BBC perpetuated this message, catching deaf

[730] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Daily Mirror*, 'TV Try Show for Deaf', 13 Jan 1952.
[731] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, U. Eason, 'The Second Anniversary of Television For Deaf Children', *The Silent World* 9.1 (June 1954), pp. 11-12.
[732] Ibid.
[733] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Notes and News', *The Silent World* 10.3 (August 1955), p. 84.
[734] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Thank you BBC', *The Silent World* 10.9 (February 1956), p. 259.
[735] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Entertainment', *The Silent World* 11.9 (February 1957), p. 259.
[736] Janet Thumim, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women, and The Box* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 4.

children at an age at which they can be encouraged to use these methods and thus become a 'success' by their normative, hearing standards.

Some sources offer a far more measured account of how the BBC and NID interacted to bring about the broadcasts. *TSW* recounted a far more balanced approach, however they maintained that the NID was the driving force behind television broadcasts for deaf people. In 1951, an article in the journal stated, 'For a matter of years now, the NID has been hammering politely but insistently on the massive bronze doors at Alexandra Palace, asking for special television for and about the deaf.'[737] It continued to say that 'at first the BBC were reluctant' but eventually came round to the idea of putting a segment on lipreading on *Women's Hour*.[738] Other articles used slightly different but significant language when reporting on the relationship between these institutions. For example, some reported on the BBC and NID 'cooperating' whilst others wrote that the NID 'approve[d]' of the BBC's plans.[739] *The Daily Telegraph* wrote that the programme was produced 'with the assistance of the National Institute for the Deaf' and the *South Wales Echo* reported that 'the National Institute for the Deaf hope to persuade the B.B.C. to put on special television programmes for people who are hard of hearing.'[740] This served as evidence of a struggle for credit for producing accessible television programmes, with both the BBC and NID vying for the position of the instigator. This is evidence of deafness becoming increasingly legitimate to the public as a cause, one that institutions were competing to gain credit for assisting.

In October 1952, a representative of the NID took a more sympathetic view of the BBC's lack of programming for deaf people during a question-and-answer session about television for deaf people at the Radio Exhibition in Earls Court, London.[741] When asked why the BBC did not produce 'special programmes for us deaf, all visual with captions where necessary and no sound?' the representative replied that:

---

[737] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'A television programme for and about the deaf', *The Silent Wor*ld 6.4 (September 1951), p. 115.
[738] Ibid.
[739] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 'TV For Deaf Children – Experiment Starts on 13 June', 3 June 1952.
AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Oldham Evening Chronicle*, 'Deaf aids', 5 June 1952.
AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Cambridge Daily News*, 'Deaf-Aids', 30 May 1952.
[740] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Daily Telegraph*, 'Deaf Children Have TV Show – Experiment In Lip Reading', 14 June 1952.
AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *South Wales Echo*, 'They Want TV Sub Titles', 16 November 1951.
[741] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Television for the Deaf', *The Silent World* 7.5 (October 1952), p. 136.

> That is a tall order. The deaf are in a minority compared with hearing viewers, and it costs an enormous amount of money to televise. Nevertheless the BBC do put out special programmes for deaf children once a month just along the lines you have suggested. Deaf grown ups seem to appreciate them every bit as much as the children and the NID are plugging away to get an occasional show for adults.[742]

This statement highlights the low expectations placed on deaf people during the period and the paternalistic attitudes of institutions such as the NID. In assuming that deaf adults would be content with programmes aimed at deaf children, the source reveals that the NID considered television to be a cultural forum for deaf people to be sat in front of and occupied rather than an exercise in expanding their horizons as they had argued in the Television for the Deaf campaign. Alongside contradictory reports on who motivated the production of programmes for deaf children, newspapers reported the purpose of these shows inconsistently in 1952, the year of the first broadcast. The most significant of these discrepancies was the stated purpose of the programmes, as reported in the popular press. Some articles, such as in *The Daily Mail* shortly before the first broadcast, claimed that the fundamental purpose of the programmes was 'to find out if deaf people can be taught to lip read by television.'[743] The *Cambridge Daily News* and *Oldham Evening Chronicle* reflected this assumption: 'The intention is to find out if deaf people can be taught to lip-read by television, and it is for this reason that the institute approve[s].'[744] However, *The Manchester Guardian* offered an alternative view, claiming that 'entertainment and not instruction is the main idea, but it is obvious that a constructive use may be made of television for this purpose [teaching lip-reading].'[745] *TSW* reported in 1952 that:

> This 'teaching' line is one the BBC does not like. They are not trying to 'teach' they say. They are merely hoping that the special way of presenting these programmes will make them easy to follow, and entertaining for children who cannot hear the spoken word.[746]

The BBC and NID later collaborated again, beginning a scheme whereby the BBC printed play synopses before airing them on television so that deaf people could read them to follow the plot when watching.[747] In response to a letter on the subject in *TSW*, the NID stated that

---

[742] Ibid.
[743] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Daily Mail*, 'Lip-reading Experiment for the Deaf – BBC Plan Lessons on Television', 27 May 1952.
[744] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Cambridge Daily News*, 'Deaf-Aids', 30 May 1952. AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Oldham Evening Chronicle*, 'Deaf aids', 5 June 1952.
[745] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Manchester Guardian*, 'Outside Broadcasts', 4 June 1952.
[746] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'The Television Experiment', *The Silent World* 7.2 (July 1952), p. 39.
[747] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'First Experiments', *The Silent World* 13.9 (February 1959), p. 263.

the BBC were concerned that the synopses would fall into the hands of the hearing and the plot would be given away to the entire viewing public.[748] The NID encouraged deaf people to 'regard this service as something quite private and exclusive to themselves.'[749] This was evidence of television as a site of identity formation, even if it was being constructed by an institution.

In working together, the NID and BBC produced programmes that enabled deaf people to interact with television more effectively than just a visual medium, as suggested in the Television for the Deaf Fund. The construction of deaf people as a section of the audience worthy of specialist programming legitimised deafness as a disability worthy of sympathy and attention. However, disablement was also present as both institutions fought to gain credit for the broadcasts, perpetuating the idea that deaf people needed paternalistic champions. Additionally, the BBC targeted accessible programmes towards children and the suggestion that adults could enjoy them equally demonstrates the limited expectations placed on deaf people during the period.

Another subject which the 1950-1960 articles in the NID scrapbooks obsessed over were the exact methods that would be used to make the programmes accessible to deaf children. These methods were stuck within the oralist tradition; while they enabled deaf children to follow the broadcasts, the BBC were implicitly constructing deaf communication as consisting of lipreading and speech. Later in the century, those who identified as Deaf fought against this assumption.

. Title cards – referred to in some coverage as subtitles – explaining the content of the show appeared on screen before filmed footage was shown. Lipreading was also included; however, the consensus was that the two methods could not be used simultaneously. *The Daily Express* stated, 'Stories will be told in pictures and captions. First the caption will be read in close-up pictures. So that deaf children may lip-read; then the caption will be shown in writing, followed by the picture to which it refers.'[750]

The Manchester Guardian explained the methods similarly, writing that 'lip-reading and writing are to be the chief methods used, and the pictures will consist of sequences from

[748] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'BBC and the NID' *The Silent World* 13.7 (December 1958), p. 210.
[749] Ibid.
[750] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Daily Express*, 'Free to See', 27 May 1952.

Children's Newsreel which have been explained first.'[751] *The Daily Telegraph* also reported that sentences would appear on screen after the presenter had spoken them.[752] Television producer Ursula Eason was quoted in the *Picture Post* in 1953 saying that the 'first rule' for television for deaf children 'is that the children must be told, in considerable detail, what they are going to see before they see it […] The announcer has to speak slowly and carefully. Phrases are then repeated in a printed caption.'[753] She later wrote in *TSW* that the 'formula has been very simple' when producing the shows.[754] She declared that the programmes could not show subtitles simultaneously as movement on screen and that children 'cannot watch lips and action pictures at the same time.'[755] The use of subtitles rather than sign language has led to the exclusion of these broadcasts from existing histories of deafness and television.[756] The neglect of the *Children's Hour* programmes within Deaf cultural histories has resulted from the fact that the methods used did not comply with Deaf peoples' assertion that they are a linguistic minority communicating primarily through sign language.

The newspaper articles emphasised the visual elements of the programmes, with *The Manchester Guardian* reporting that there would be 'pictures of how to make things with the hands, in which the emphasis will be on actions instead of spoken explanations.'[757] The genre also appears to have been key, as *The Yorkshire Observer* reported: 'Television as a medium of entertainment can be followed by the totally deaf and the hard of hearing as so many of its programmes are entirely visual – sport, conjuring, clowning, juggling, travel, cookery, ballet, and dancing for example.'[758] In this, the BBC, like the NID in the Television for the Deaf Fund campaign, continued to dismiss sound as a non-essential component of television, despite concurrently using methods to compensate for understanding lost through being unable to engage fully or at all with the sound element of the cultural forum.

---

[751] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Manchester Guardian*, 'Outside Broadcasts', 4 June 1952.
[752] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Daily Telegraph*, 'Deaf Children Have TV Show – Experiment in Lip Reading', 14 June 1952.
[753] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Picture Post*, J. Bush, 'TV Helps The "Mandy's"', 19 September 1953.
[754] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, U. Eason, 'The Second Anniversary of Television For Deaf Children', *The Silent World* 9.1 (June 1954), pp. 11-12.
[755] Ibid.
[756] Jackson, pp. 292-4.
Margaret Deuchar, *British Sign Language* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 43.
[757] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Manchester Guardian*, 'Outside Broadcasts', 4 June 1952.
[758] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Yorkshire Observer*, Title Unclear, Date Unclear.

Significant news events in the 1950s were also adapted for deaf children. For example, before the coronation of Elizabeth II in June 1953, a special feature adapted for deaf children explained what the television coverage of the event would show so they could follow it alongside a hearing audience.[759] In May 1953, BBC also presented the ascent of Everest in an accessible programme.[760] This is evidence of television fulfilling the function that advocates of television for the deaf had envisioned: integrating deaf people into hearing society by giving them access to current affairs. However, the NID did not suggest accessible broadcasts as a necessity during the parallel Television for the Deaf Fund campaign. Therefore, it is also evidence of the shortcomings of mainstream broadcasts for deaf people and the importance of sound in television, which posed a barrier to many deaf and hard of hearing people.

The methods designed by the BBC and advocated by the NID in the *Children's Hour* broadcasts enabled deaf audiences to follow the shows somewhat coherently. However, in choosing subtitles and lipreading, they catered to what would later be deaf rather than Deaf groups. In creating this division, the institution mediated the engagement of the deaf community with the cultural forum. They constructed their preferred methods of accessibility as the right ones for the whole deaf community. Through this, they triggered Deaf identity formation as the shows highlighted the fractions in the homogenous group and how Deaf people were side-lined.

The *Children's Hour* broadcasts were not instantly successful. In 1952, the methods used to make the first programmes accessible to deaf people were criticised; however, they later appeared to have been more satisfactory for deaf people. Despite this, printed text remained significant in aiding deaf people's understanding of television. This suggested that it was not the ideal technology for deaf people as presented by the BBC and that deaf people were less enthusiastic about engaging with television compared to their traditional form of communication – print.

Several reports stated that the first broadcast in June 1952 did not reach the expectations of a television show accessible to deaf children. Shortly after it aired, *News Chronicle* produced the headline 'Deaf Children's TV Needs Simplifying', quoting a teacher

[759] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Picture Post*, J. Bush, 'TV Helps The "Mandy's"', 19 September 1953.
[760] Ibid.

of deaf children pointing out the programme's flaws.[761] Mr Bernard Head, a teacher of deaf children and father of a deaf child, wrote of the programme 'the words were so long and the sentences so involved that a child of 16 could not have grasped it' despite its target audience being five to seven years old.[762] Despite the NID advising them, he added that the BBC had not considered the delays in language and literacy development experienced by many deaf children.[763] *TSW* also reported complaints. A key issue raised was the age range the BBC was aiming the programme towards.[764] The journal reported that:

> With so small and specialised a public the answer has got to be compromise […] The older ones seem to think that they were somewhat played down too, however, and that next time they should be given more complicated phrases to read.[765]

It appears that the BBC did take on board and act upon criticism of the programme, as Joan Bush reported in the *Picture Post* almost a year and a half later: 'Seventeen months ago Children's Television put on a trial programme for the deaf. It was a flop. Today, TV's monthly quarter-of-an-hour for deaf children is popular not only with the deaf but with those who can hear.'[766] *News Chronicle* conceded in February 1953, 'The programmes with, experience, have now gained great value.'[767]

The Daily Telegraph reiterated the importance of the group setting following the June 1953 debut of the *Children's Hour* programme adapted for deaf children. Pupils at the Residential School for Jewish Deaf Children watched the first broadcast in a classroom setting.[768] Headteacher Mr L. J. Benham asked the pupils to repeat the presenter's words to see if they could follow the presenter's speech. He claimed that 'nearly all did so. They said afterwards that they enjoyed the programme very much.'[769] This was a contrast to reviews of the first show mentioned previously. Deaf people's engagement with television was constructed by the NID, as well as teachers of deaf students, as being improved by communal viewing. This contrasted with the argument presented by advocates that television was an

---

[761] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *News Chronicle*, 'Deaf Children's TV Needs Simplifying', 23 Jan 1952.
[762] Ibid.
[763] Ibid.
[764] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'The Television Experiment', *The Silent World* 7.2 (July 1952), p. 39.
[765] Ibid.
[766] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Picture Post*, J. Bush, 'TV Helps The "Mandy's"', 19 September 1953.
[767] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *News Chronicle*, Title Unclear, 2 February 1953.
[768] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Daily Telegraph*, 'Deaf Children Have TV Show – Experiment in Lip Reading', 14 June 1952.
[769] Ibid.

ideal cultural forum for deaf people, as it appears that a collective experience was required to decipher what was being spoken on screen.

Despite the NID's emphasis on television as a visual technology and an ideal medium for deaf people throughout the 1950s, the continuing reliance on print to make television comprehensible to deaf people suggested otherwise. The introduction of the *Children's Hour* broadcasts in June 1952 coincided with the introduction of pages for children in the NIDs official journal, *TSW*.[770] In these pages, the journal printed the subtitles that had appeared on the broadcasts and the pictures used.[771] In doing this, the journal suggested that television was difficult to access without assistance from textual resources. By printing the storyboards, the journal and the NID could gain insight into the success of the methods used to make the broadcasts accessible. For example, they stated, 'Here are the captions, were you able to read them all?'[772] Before the broadcast, printed explanations of significant televised events were also published in *TSW*. For example, a 'What you will see' guide was printed before the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953.[773] Letters also appeared to complain when the journal did not publish a summary of the Queen's Christmas broadcast.[774]

The BBC's willingness to adapt and develop the methods that they used to make the children's broadcasts accessible demonstrated that the BBC took on board deaf people's feedback and that they considered the viewing experiences of deaf people to be important. As the BBCs profit model relied on the license fee, set by the government, the positive publicity generated by the campaign would also have been useful to the organisation in maintaining public and political support. The enduring dominance, however, of print to accompany broadcasts revealed that deaf people did not engage with television as easily as the BBC and NID projected. This suggested that rather than an enabling cultural forum that, unlike radio, deaf people could engage with, it was treated by factions of the deaf community as yet another area from which they were excluded.

6.4. The NID and the co-construction of D/deafness and television

[770] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'The Television Experiment', *The Silent World* 7.2 (July 1952), p. 39.
[771] Ibid.
[772] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'The Second Television Programme', *The Silent World* 7.3 (August 1952), p. 93.
[773] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'What You Will See', *The Silent World* 8.1 (June 1953), p. 16-19.
[774] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'What's Your Opinion? Readers Forum', *The Silent World* 12.9 (February 1958), p. 283.

Whilst sparse, there were indications of deaf people being involved in the television for the deaf campaign in the early 1950s. One newspaper reported that at the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Association for the Hard of Hearing annual meeting, where the NID announced the television fund, 'special amplifying arrangements were used' alongside lip reading and blackboards. This indicated that deaf people were involved at high levels of the charity.[775] Exploring the letter pages of *TSW* offered some closer insights into deaf people's opinions of television between 1950 and 1960. Some letters printed during this time presented a positive response to television. Miss Florence D. Buddle wrote to the journal in 1955 that she was 'quite a television fan, thanking God in my heart many times these last seven years knowing what a blessing television is.'[776] Similarly, after a television appeal for the fund, an anonymous 66-year-old deaf man sent in a letter stating that he was very grateful for the appeal and that he and his wife would like a television set as it 'would help brighten up our lives.'[777]

I considered evidence found in *TSW* letters pages cautiously as it served as a mouthpiece for the NID, and it is unlikely that the journal would print anything too opposed to the NIDs objectives. However, there were issues and frustrations for deaf people when engaging with television, disputing the commonly used line by the NID that television was the 'perfect' medium for deaf people. In February 1954, a series of letters under the caption 'No Radio Voices' ran over four journal issues. The letters did not address whether it was speech on radio broadcasts in particular that made radio inaccessible, or if speech in general was something the writers could not engage with. The piece began with a deaf woman, Mrs H. F. Langridge, complaining that she could not hear radio or television.[778] What followed were agreements or suggestions of ways to improve her listening experience from other correspondents, showing that the sound element of television was an obstacle for some. Another letter in 1955 from A. V. Wilson sparked another series of letters across several journal issues. The discussion focused on Wilson's request that the NID ask the BBC to 'abandon their new policy of announcements on television without view of the speaker […] It

[775] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, Title Unclear, Date Unclear.
[776] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'What's Your Opinion? Readers Forum', *The Silent World* 10.3 (August 1955), p. 86.
[777] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'What's Your Opinion? Readers Forum', *The Silent World* 10.9 (February 1956), p. 287.
[778] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, Mrs H. F. Langridge, 'No Radio Voices', *The Silent World 8.9* (February 1954), p. 284.

is a backward step for those who are deaf.'[779] The NID wrote a response to the original letter assuring the correspondent that the announcements made off-screen were unimportant.[780] This demonstrated again some of the challenges faced by deaf people when engaging with television and the NID's continued avoidance of addressing the sound element of the technology.

As demonstrated, there were some positive opinions on television. However, between 1950 and 1960, no letters on television appeared in *The British Deaf Times* or *British Deaf News*, journals which were not associated with the NID. The letters above demonstrated that engagement with television was a contested subject in the British deaf community. The lack of enthusiasm to discuss television suggests that some deaf people did not regard television as an ideal cultural forum. This was a stark contrast to the NID's standpoint.

My analysis of the NID's Television for the Deaf campaign reveals that the institution constructed television as a cultural forum that would benefit deaf people, bringing them enjoyment and sympathy whilst integrating them into society. In doing this, the NID made television a battleground for legitimising deafness, attempting to overthrow public perceptions of deafness as a lesser disability than blindness. However, to do this, deaf people were negatively impacted by a patronising and paternalistic campaign. Television technology had an undeniable sound element that, despite the best efforts of the NID to neglect it, excluded some deaf people. What this construction of television did do, however, was contribute to the consciousness amongst D/deaf people that they were being disabled by general society, institutions meant to represent them, and technology, thus enabling identity formation.

Regarding the *Children's Hour* broadcasts, both the NID and BBC asked for and acted upon the feedback they received from deaf people, suggesting that they were valued as agents in developing television for deaf people. However, the enduring legacy of the shows is non-existent within Deaf history. The NID drew upon the opinions of deaf people when evaluating the success of the first broadcast for deaf children in June 1952; as reported in *The Daily Mail*, they urged 'all adult people who can get to a television set to follow the experiments and report on their value.'[781] The *Oldham Evening Chronicle* similarly stated

[779] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, A. V. Wilson, 'TV Announcers', *The Silent World* 9.10 (March 1955), p. 313.
[780] Ibid.
[781] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Daily Mail*, 'Lip-reading Experiment for the Deaf – BBC Plan Lessons on Television', 27 May 1952.

that 'the Institute are advising as many deaf people as possible to see the programmes, and are anxious to get from them a nation-wide report on the success of the programme.'[782] This indicated that deaf people were included to some extent in the instigation of the television for the deaf campaign and served as valued experts when the BBC initially attempted to provide accessible television for deaf children.

Following the first two programmes, *TSW* printed a double-page spread on the feedback they had received via letters.[783] The article contained a section of feedback from 'Grown Ups' and 'The Children'.[784] In the first section, a teacher at the Birmingham School for the Deaf, Mr H. H. Sharrock, wrote that the children at his school had enjoyed the programmes and could follow the methods used to make them accessible.[785] However, the programmes 'lacked continuity and validity. The children are quite capable of concentrating on one topic for fifteen minutes.'[786] He suggested that the show focus on one topic for its entirety rather than four short segments. Mr E. S. Greenway, a teacher at the Yorkshire Residential School for the Deaf, made the same suggestion, however, for the opposing reason that the programmes 'moved too swiftly from one idea to another for deaf children.'[787] Mr E. W. Stannard of the Anerley School in London wrote that he had shown the programme to 45 children aged 12-16.[788] He reported that while they could follow the programme, it was not interesting enough for that age group.[789] There was some positive feedback from the 'Grown Ups' but also much criticism. In contrast, 'The Children' addressed their letters directly to the show producer Ursula Eason and presenter Jasmine Bligh and were entirely positive.[790] Whilst glossing over any problem deaf children – the stated audience for the programmes – may have had, the publication of negative feedback demonstrated that the journal did enable deaf people to have a say in deaf television during the period.

In the 1950s, the *Children's Hour* broadcasts provoked responses that indicated the presence of fractions between different parts of the deaf community. In 1954, the NID Annual Report on the *Children's Hour* programmes had 'aroused controversy on educational

[782] AOHL, RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Oldham Evening Chronicle*, 'Deaf aids', 5 June 1952.
[783] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'TV Comments', *The Silent World* 7.3 (August 1952), pp. 90-91.
[784] Ibid.
[785] Ibid., p. 90.
[786] Ibid.
[787] Ibid.
[788] Ibid.
[789] Ibid.
[790] Ibid., p. 91.

methods' for deaf children, something they viewed as inevitable.' [791] In August 1952, *TSW* reported that the Margate School for the Deaf and Dumb would appear on the *Children's Hour* broadcast. The article reported that 'because it is not pure[ly] oral, however, it is not a timely representative modern school for the deaf, though whether it is a better or worse school is a dangerously moot point.'[792] It stated that the children were happy regardless and urged viewers to 'watch without prejudice'.[793] In 1958, the programmes continued to spark debate. The mother of a deaf child wrote into *TSW* stating that she was 'very disappointed that a section in which deaf children appeared did not show them using speech or lipreading, and that background music ran over the entire piece.'[794] These sources revealed that debates about communication methods that began in the 19th century and later defined D/deaf identities were being furthered by the popularisation of new cultural forums.

On the second anniversary of the first broadcast, BBC producer Ursula Eason wrote that 'we are always trying to present something new – not special versions of standard children's programmes but something of their very own that will new interest, new knowledge and stimulus to this small but so important section of the television audience.'[795] This showed a defined deaf community and the separation of deaf people as a minority within broader audiences.

Whilst the attitudes and language used by the NID and BBC regarding deaf people and television during the period were negative, these developments did contribute to consciousness within the deaf community and its division into D/deaf identities. Television, in later decades, became a point of activism. Margaret Deuchar wrote in 1984 of the Deaf Broadcasting Campaign that began in the late 1970s that 'their aim was to promote the use of subtitling and sign language on television', regarding them as having had 'some success in both areas.'[796] Christopher Stone argued that 'under the 1996 Broadcasting Act broadcasters are obliged to provide five per cent of programming by 2005, either presented in or translated

[791] BL, National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports, P.P.1108.cbh, *National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1954*, 1954, p. 27.
[792] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'Communication', *The Silent World* 7.3 (August 1952), p. 71.
[793] Ibid.
[794] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, 'What's your opinion? Reader's Forum', *The Silent World* 12.11 (April 1958), p. 348.
[795] BL, The Silent World P.P.1108.bcg, U. Eason, 'The Second Anniversary of Television For Deaf Children', *The Silent World* 9.1 (June 1954), pp. 11-12.
[796] Deuchar, p. 43.

into sign language.'[797] However, he viewed broadcasters doing this as not a sign of their commitment to deafness rather that they 'see it as a legal obligation.'[798]

Sign language is a crucial part of Deaf culture, with Deaf people viewing themselves as a linguistic minority, representing 'their primary experience'.[799] This explains why Atherton and Jackson have omitted the history of subtitled and lipread television.[800] This politicisation confirms Wyatt's view that non-use and lack of access is not a 'deficiency', as it has motivated identity in this case.[801] Spearheaded by a deaf charity and the BBC, the programmes clashed with later developments in the twentieth century as some deaf people called into question their relationship with institutions claiming to represent them. They moved away from what Harlan Lane called 'the mask of benevolence' and 'the audist establishment' and sought to pursue their own identities and have their own opinions represent themselves.[802]

6.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed two campaigns that the NID ran regarding television from 1950-1960. Both campaigns reveal how the NID and BBC mediated how deaf people engaged with television. Both organisations attempted to construct television as an ideal cultural forum for deaf people, which failed. Whilst these campaigns did enable deaf people by giving the cause of deafness a platform, alongside being, unlike the radio, in some way accessible to deaf people, the language and methods used to acquire and adapt the technology proved upsetting and exclusionary to parts of the deaf community. These disabling elements,

---

[797] Christopher Stone, 'Deaf access for Deaf people: the translation of the television news from English into British Sign Language' in *Media for All – Subtitling for the Deaf, Audio Description and Sign Language*, ed. Jorge Díaz-Cintas, Pilar Orero and Aline Remael (New York: Rodopi, 2007) 71-88 (99. 72-73).
[798] Ibid.
[799] Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture – In Search of Deafhood* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2003), p. xvii.
Tracy Skelton and Gill Valentine, '"It feels normal like being Deaf is normal": An exploration into the complexities of defining D/deafness and young D/deaf people's identities' Canadian Geographer 47 (2003), 451-466 (p. 453).
[800] Atherton, (2012).
Jackson, pp. 292-94.
[801] Sally Wyatt, 'Non-Users Also Matter: The Construction of Users and Non-Users of the Internet' in *How Users Matter – The Co-Construction of Users and Technology*, ed. by Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005) pp. 67-80 (p. 68).
[802] Harlan Lane, *The Mask of Benevolence – Disabling the Deaf Community* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1992), pp. 69-71.
Renate Fischer and Harlan Lane, eds, *Looking Back: A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and their Sign Languages* (Hamburg: Signum Press, 1993).

however, did have the unintentional consequence of enabling D/deaf identity formation. Existing literature has explored television and deaf history marginally and failed to cover the period before the 1970s.[803] Covering both topics in the period 1950-1960 has revealed that how deaf people engaged with television and had their engagement mediated was critical in laying the foundations of D/deaf identity formation.

Elements of both campaigns did benefit deaf and hard of hearing people at the time. The Television for the Deaf Fund used the initiative to acquire television sets and licence concessions for deaf people, as well as attempting to legitimise deafness as a significant disability and gain public support and sympathy. Comparisons to the Wireless for the Blind campaign of the 1930s support my argument that the NID weaponised the technology against public perceptions of deafness as a lesser cause than blindness. This was to construct deaf people as a significant constituency both within disability generally and wider society. The visual elements of television were beneficial, unlike the purely aural radio, and deaf people could engage partially. The production of *Children's Hour* programmes demonstrated an acknowledgement of deaf people, although limited to children, as an important section of the public viewing audience. The vying for credit between the BBC and NID for the programmes emphasised the recognition of deaf children as a significant audience. The development of methods to make television accessible may not always have been flawless. However, they did at least initiate techniques that would be refined later in the century.

Aspects of both campaigns also, however, constructed negative stereotypes of deaf people. To publicise and legitimise the need for the Television for the Deaf Fund, the NID emphasised the negative parts of deaf and hard of hearing people's experiences, constructing them as incapable, isolated, and with little agency. The sound element of television, primarily ignored by campaigners, had always been a part of television and thus prevented full engagement with the cultural forum. Using the technology as a purely visual medium was also difficult, as the BBC sometimes broadcast announcements off-screen, preventing lipreading.

The *Children's Hour* broadcasts also had harmful elements. The methods used – subtitling and lipreading – fell into the oralist tradition of educating deaf people.[804] The lack of sign language in the programmes resulted in the erasure of the programmes in Deaf

[803] Jackson, pp. 292-94.
Deuchar, p. 43.
[804] Lane, p. 69.

histories, as those who identify as Deaf and therefore consider themselves a linguistic minority rejected oralist methods of communication. As the social model of disability became popularised in the late 20th century, scholars who subscribed to it rejected medical and technological perceptions of disability.[805] Therefore the *Children's Hour* broadcasts, which contained technological, oralist solutions to deafness, were also ignored.

The fight for credit between the BBC and NID also revealed the considerable paternalism shown towards deaf people in the period. The decision to adapt children's programmes, not adult ones, also demonstrated the patronising attitudes towards deaf people and that the BBC did not consider them as important a part of the audience as claimed.

Whilst there is evidence that deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with television in the mid-twentieth century, the sound element of television and early techniques of making broadcasts accessible excluded many. This further highlighted fractures in the deaf community around who could or could not engage with emerging cultural forums. The failure of the Television for the Deaf Fund suggested that the state and hearing public did not consider television essential to the deaf community, as they had with blind people and radio. Deaf cultural histories have not acknowledged the two initiatives in this chapter, revealing deaf people's engagement with television in this era to be controversial and contested. Unlike earlier in the century, divisions around whether to embrace or reject the sound elements of cultural forums, as explored regarding cinema in Chapters Four and Five, meant that the NID was unable to present universal engagement to the hearing public.

Deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with television was highly mediated by the NID, as they attempted to present television as a cultural forum perfectly suited to the deaf community. The sound element of the medium was indisputable, however, and neither the public nor the deaf community was wholly convinced. The NID and BBC encouraged deaf people to engage with television using specific techniques which were impossible for some and unpopular with others. The frequent comparisons that the NID made with the Wireless for the Blind Fund demonstrated that they were trying to raise publicity for deafness as a cause. However, by this stage in the twentieth century, the divisions in the deaf

[805] Mike Oliver, 'The Social Model of Disability: Thirty Years On', *Disability and Society*, 28 (2013), 1024-1026 (p. 1024-1026).

community were too apparent, and people in different areas of the community had differing opinions on television.

The debate around whether and how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with television shaped both the forum and ideas of deafness. This happened in multiple ways across the deaf community. The BBC and mainstream press began to value deaf people as audience members and developed technology to try and make the cultural forum accessible. For those who supported the NID initiatives, television was constructed as a huge boon and the answer to issues with radio and cinema. To those who were excluded or disliked how they were being encouraged to engage with television, it was yet another challenge that the deaf community faced.

The discourse around the television initiatives constructed deaf people as disabled and in need of sympathy and paternalistic help. The neglect of these events in Deaf cultural histories indicates that some sections of the deaf community disagreed with this. Divisions within the deaf community, highlighted by engagement with cultural forums, were constructing new ideas of D/deafness and identity, which would become increasingly apparent in the following decades.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Between 1925 and 1960, there were considerable changes in both the nature and the extent of deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with the emerging cultural forums of radio, cinema, and television. In the preceding chapters, I have shown that the two most significant changes were the diversity of experiences recorded by deaf and hard of hearing people and the different ways in which they (re-)shaped ideas of deafness while engaging in those cultural forums.

Beginning in the 1920s, radio was rarely discussed within archival sources and dismissed by the NID as irrelevant to deaf people other than as a source of exclusion. Within the materials that I have explored, there were indications that whether deaf and hard of hearing people could engage with radio was contested by some. For example, articles in newspapers and letters published in deaf journals recounted the experiences of individuals who used and enjoyed the forum. Unlike with radio, the variation in experiences became far more apparent within archival and newspaper sources in the 1930s and 1940s as talkies usurped silent film in cinemas. Here a split emerged between those who wanted to continue to engage exclusively with silent films and those who attempted to engage with the talkies. Fractures that had emerged in the deaf community with the introduction of methods of measuring hearing and hearing aids widened as some were able to engage with sound technology whilst others were not.

In the 1950s, these fractures became more evident as silent film provision proved too expensive for the BDA. Meanwhile, the NID shifted to focus on deaf and hard of hearing people engaging with sound, including talkie cinema. This reinforced the distinctive directions different members of the British deaf and hard of hearing community were going in and which organisations and publications aligned with these different factions. The initiatives from the NID in the mid to late 1950s surrounding television demonstrated an attempt to show universal, standardised engagement with the forum across the deaf community. However, television's lack of success for the deaf and the disregard for accessible broadcasts within Deaf histories mark the difficulties of this.

In this thesis, I have revealed the shifting focus of the NID, which ranged from rejecting engagement with some cultural forums to promoting total engagement with others and the realities of how diverse and divisive people's experiences were. As per the research questions that I set out in my introduction, three key aspects have been explored: how deaf

and hard of hearing people engaged with emerging cultural forums, how this engagement was mediated, and how both ideas of deafness were shaped by the discourse around the cultural forums and vice versa.

How deaf and hard of hearing people, deaf organisations and publications, and mainstream media engaged with the cultural forums resulted in new ideas of D/deafness, identity, and accessibility. Little scholarship has been dedicated to deaf and hard of hearing people's experiences with these three dominant cultural forums in British society. Additionally, where D/deafness and these technologies have been connected, it is to demonstrate the exclusion of those with hearing deemed 'problematic' by broader society. The methods for making the technologies accessible are, from a modern perspective, associated strongly with particular D/deaf identities – for example, whether assistive technologies or sign language were utilised – resulting in D/deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with them being sparsely documented, and often written about in later decades when identities and methods for accessibility were more established.

I have demonstrated, however, that discussion and debate about the use, or non-use, of radio, 'talkie' cinema, and television was taking place between deaf and hard of hearing people, the organisations around them, deaf journals, and mainstream press in the years 1925-1960. To draw out the complexities of the appearance of these technologies in deaf and hard of hearing people's lives, I have explored multiple types of deafness and identity and the connections between each cultural forum rather than simply investigating them in isolation. By celebrating the complexity of D/deaf histories, and the contested nature of each cultural forum as they appeared in various actors' lives, I have been able to focus on the nuances of the topic and draw the following conclusions.

7.1. Engagement, mediation, and co-construction: addressing my research questions

7.1i. How did deaf and hard of hearing people engage with emerging cultural forums, 1925-1960?

Before the 1920s, many cultural forums, for example, theatre, music halls and lectures, were portrayed in institutional records and deaf journals as exclusionary. As new cultural forums emerged, however, evidence of deaf and hard of hearing people engaging with them was recorded by members of the community. Through an examination of archival

material and newspaper sources, I have discovered two significant findings in relation to how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with radio, cinema, and television and how this engagement evolved through the early to mid-twentieth century in Britain. As set out in the introduction to this thesis, the first of these findings is that how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with the cultural forums was always contested and diverse; however, this became more apparent over the decades in question. How, or if, deaf and hard of hearing people engaged connects to my second key finding: as new cultural forums became more popular, the discussion and decisions made around engagement highlighted and contributed to new thresholds and divisions within the British deaf community.

During the late 1920s and 1930s, domestic radio use increased and became commonplace in most British households. As set out in Chapter Two, blind people's engagement with the cultural forum was encouraged and celebrated, most obviously through the Wireless for the Blind Fund. Deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with radio, however, was scarcely recorded, particularly by journals and institutions; for example, the executive council of the NID dismissed radio as useful to only a tiny portion of hard of hearing people.

During these decades and into the 1940s, deaf and hard of hearing people had to negotiate many new areas of electrical sound. As explored in Chapter Three, these included hearing aids, warning sirens, telephones, and radio. Through my research, I have found evidence that this negotiation included deaf people both actively engaging with and rejecting new sound technologies. This rejection was, at times, intentional but sometimes unavoidable. Clubs, institutions, and print communication often fulfilled the needs that the cultural forums were failing to meet, providing education, entertainment, and socialisation.

Despite the NID's stance that radio was not suitable for deaf people, there is evidence that people who identified as deaf experimented with the cultural forum. Testimonies in journal articles and letter pages reveal that there were individuals who self-described as deaf seeking to use radio, at times through assistive aids, to feel less isolated or left out. As evidenced in Chapter Two, blind people were actively encouraged to engage with the radio. There is evidence of blind people high up in organisations using it, such as veteran and MP Captain Ian Fraser. Within the deaf community, engagement with each cultural forum was far more contested. Some examples include the letters from deafened veteran Frank Fox

extolling radio use in 1926 and articles in *The Manchester Guardian* in the 1920s and 1930s, highlighting those who enjoyed wireless broadcasts through the use of electrical aids and loudspeakers. Assistive aids included the mouth needle used by Mrs L.H. and the headphones used by someone writing into *The Manchester Guardian* under the pseudonym 'a deaf listener', as explored in Chapter Three.[806]

Additionally, it is reported that officials at some institutions, such as the Sheffield Institute for the Deaf, would interpret broadcasts to their members through sign language. Whilst rare, these anecdotes demonstrate an awareness of deaf listeners. However, as important deaf journals and organisations did not widely promote it, this engagement was not discussed or encouraged.

The lack of attention given to deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with radio is in direct contrast to how their engagement with silent film was reported in the 1930s and 1940s. In Chapter Four, I examined archival sources from within the deaf community. According to these sources, silent film was a unique cultural forum in which deaf and hard of hearing people were equal and active audience members, on a par with their hearing counterparts. As I have uncovered in this chapter, however, this narrative was promoted by deaf organisations and journals at the time and later scholars of Deafness. Their motives were to promote D/deafness and D/deaf culture to raise awareness of both D/deaf and hard of hearing people's interest in cultural forums. Furthermore, the end of the silent film era served as a helpful case study for the discrimination and disablement deaf people faced as sound technology developed. The sound element of silent film, and the logistics of deaf and hard of hearing people attending cinema showings, are neglected in both the sources and contemporary accounts of deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with the cultural forum.

I have found some evidence of deaf and hard of hearing people engaging with silent films; for example, in 1913, a cinema manager reported that some deaf patrons attended their film screenings and, in the 1920s, cinema trips were gifted to members of the British Home for Deaf and Dumb Women by both benefactors and cinema managers. However, greater

[806] PQBP, Mrs L. H., 'My Favourite Broadcast – Her Only Experience', *Answers* 91.15 (26 August 1933), p. 26. PQBP, '"The Deaf Listener": Headphones', *The Manchester Guardian* (6 March 1935), p. 6.

levels of engagement have been reported *after* the advent of talkies, for example, through the BDA's Cinema Scheme, initiated by Leslie Edwards and through which deaf and hard of hearing people could view silent films at deaf organisations as an alternative to talkies. Before the initiation of the scheme, it was difficult to assess how much and with what enthusiasm deaf and hard of hearing people were engaging with silent film in the era before talkies. Afterwards, silent film was framed as a viable and beloved alternative, with evidence supporting the popularity of silent film showings in clubs and institutions across Britain until the cost became too great and the supply of films dwindled. Also telling was the lack of protest movements against the end of silent films in Britain, unlike in the United States. However, the narrative that was promoted about deaf people's engagement with silent film at the same time as talkies became the standard format in cinemas was helpful to deaf organisations for highlighting the difficulties that many in the deaf community faced.

In Chapter Five, I identified how engagement with talkies, like radio, was deeply contested within the archival sources. For profoundly deaf people, and those who disliked assistive technologies, the exclusion from cinema as speech soundtracks were introduced was an upsetting reality. For others, for whom it was an option, experimenting with talkies and methods of accessibility were of interest, especially in the 1940s and 1950s. *The Silent World's* film columns were popular, as evidenced by letters published in the magazine. Many deaf and hard of hearing people showed up to multiple experiments in accessibility, both for the captioned screening of the film *Morning Departure* and later the NID focus groups for improving assistive technology in cinemas.

Deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement, or lack of engagement, with cinema demonstrated how access to a cultural medium could highlight divisions within the British deaf community. Whilst some groups' needs were provided for, others were not. Ultimately, access to talkies created a new threshold for who was considered deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing, as whether an individual could engage with the sound element and how they engaged contributed to how they were defined by themselves and others. Those who could not access talkies through assistive technology, or chose not to engage with them, were excluded. This exclusion contributed to the formation of separate D/deaf identities, as deaf people's experience of accessing talkies varied greatly.

Interest in talkies from within the NID and members of the British cinema industry offered a unique insight into deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with talkies. Feedback on a captioned film and later assistive aids in cinemas demonstrated that for some, mainly those with some hearing and the ability – and desire – to use hearing aids, talkies as a cultural forum was something they wanted to experience alongside hearing audience members. This desire to interact with sound in a communal setting was not unique to the 1950s. As far back as 1909, plans for assistive aids built into churches and theatres were being patented, like inventor Augustus Rosenburg's device that 'in a church or theatre, the microphone may be in circuit with a number of vibrators for the use of different people'.[807]

The levels of experimentation in the deaf community regarding cinema, for example, with watching captioned European films or open captions on English-language films and assistive aids, demonstrated that for a significant portion of the British deaf community, engagement with talkies was desired. For those who did not, or could not, engage, cinema as a cultural forum was divisive and drew new lines through the community. The recorded discourse around cinema in the 1940s and 1950s is markedly different from radio in the 1920s and 1930s. More significant disparities between individual engagement and the opinions of organisations and publications were evident, and the differences in the experiences of people with different types of deafness were far more apparent.

Before the Second World War, discussions were taking place on how and if deaf people would engage with television. Comments were published in deaf journals, for example, the remarks of J. Ellis in the *DQN* in 1935, and Michael King-Beer undertook a small study in 1949. As explored in Chapter Four, after the war, the Television for the Deaf scheme appeared to receive positive feedback from the deaf community, as did the accessible *Children's Hour* broadcasts for deaf children. The positive feedback that emphasised deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with television was, however, published by officials involved in the fund.

I found evidence of members of the deaf community raising the issue of sound, which has always been a key component of the cultural forum. Suggestions of how to make

[807] Augustas Rosenburg, 'Improvements in Apparatus for Assisting the Deaf to Hear', *Espacenet Patent Search* https://worldwide.espacenet.com/publicationDetails/biblio?FT=D&date=19091125&DB=EPODOC&CC=GB&NR=190901420A [accessed 3 July 2023].

television accessible to deaf and hard of hearing adults were also not met. Oralist methods, such as lipreading, were used, excluding those who relied on sign language. The Television for the Deaf Fund ended in 1961 due to a lack of funds, suggesting that deaf people's engagement with the forum was not treated with interest or sympathy by many members of the hearing public. Additionally, the NID did not consider it essential to allocate the initiative funds from elsewhere in the organisation. Most scholars who write from a Deaf perspective do not comment on this early engagement between deaf people and television. They date the beginnings of accessible television later in the century, suggesting that levels of engagement were not as high as promoted during the era. The sources regarding deaf people's engagement with television have revealed, however, that by the 1950s, how and if deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with television was so deeply contested and diverse that one universal method of engagement was non-existent and therefore challenging to promote.

In investigating how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with new cultural forums, I have uncovered various experiences, from rejection and exclusion to engagement, using multiple methods, some purely visual and some audio-visual. A key finding of this thesis is that the diversity of the experiences and choices deaf and hard of hearing people made regarding radio, cinema, and television became more apparent over the twentieth century and fed into later D/deaf identities and what was recorded in D/deaf histories. These were based mainly on the new thresholds of deafness highlighted by the forums – for example, whether accessing the audio element of them was possible – and the methods of communication people tried to use, whether that was assistive technologies, captions, or gestures. It is striking that, other than silent films, deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with the cultural forums has been paid little attention by historians of D/deafness and disability. Much of this is due to how this engagement correlated or contrasted with later D/deaf identities. Another reason, however, is that the engagement was so highly mediated by those claiming to represent deaf interests that it is difficult to quantify or analyse deaf and hard of hearing people's experiences.

7.1ii. How was the discussion of the cultural forums mediated within the deaf community, and by whom? How were they presented both within and outside of the deaf community?

How deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with radio, cinema and television was heavily mediated between 1925 and 1960, as was how engagement was presented to the

hearing public. The motivation behind this mediation evolved throughout the period as deaf organisations began to harness the publicity potential of framing engagement in certain ways. Additionally, organisations and publications opposed one another on how, or even if, deaf and hard of hearing people should engage with the cultural forums. From a consensus on the dismissal of radio in the 1920s, different organisations and publications were divided on how to present talkie cinema – as either exclusionary or a cultural forum deaf people should try to engage with – from the 1930s onwards. By 1950, the NID's attempts to frame television as an ideal cultural forum for deaf people demonstrated that sections of the community recognised that forums could be mediated in such a way as to connect it with a cause in the public imagination, in this case, deafness. However, the lack of success of the two television initiatives also exposes the fracturing of the deaf community in Britain, as shaping a forum that was ideally suited to an incredibly diverse group proved difficult.

In the 1920s, members of deaf organisations witnessed the success of the Wireless for the Blind Fund, as set out in Chapter Two of this thesis. Officials within the RNIB, St Dunstan's, and the BBC, alongside other organisations, focused time and resources on encouraging blind people to engage with radio and persuaded the mainstream media and hearing public of its usefulness to the blind people using the forum. By setting out a realistic and limited campaign, and by drawing on sympathy and a sense of responsibility for blinded veterans of the First World War, they enshrined the initiative in a successful parliamentary bill. Those involved with the Wireless for the Blind Fund were clear on the scheme's aims, purpose and importance, which was picked up on by the mainstream press. Radio was promoted as a tool for education and civic engagement, points regularly highlighted by those involved with the initiative. Influential figures such as Churchill and members of the royal family were involved in the campaign's publicity. They conveyed to those outside the blind community how blind people would benefit from using wireless. Across records for St Dunstan's and RNIB, radio use was framed in an overwhelmingly positive way, which was reflected in how newspapers reported on the topic. Blind people's engagement with radio was heavily mediated by members of the prominent organisations within the community, something that their counterparts within the deaf community would attempt to emulate as the twentieth century proceeded.

Within the deaf community, the NID was dominant in shaping how the cultural forums were discussed, as established in Chapter Three. In the 1920s and 1930s, as the

Wireless for the Blind Fund became increasingly successful, members of the NID executive committee took a different stance on radio regarding deaf and hard of hearing people, declaring it to be of 'no-use' to large parts of the deaf community. This mediated how radio was perceived in the upper echelons of the deaf community, for example, in institutional records in the NID and BDA and deaf publications such as the *BDT* and *DQN*. The NID focused on other concerns during the era, for example, the increased use of sirens as warning devices and developments in hearing aid technology.

Within deaf journals and newspaper articles, however, there is evidence that the narrative of radio as not suitable for those within the deaf community was being contested. This counter-narrative was rarely reported on and, unlike later in the era, was not utilised by deaf organisations. By the 1960s, the NID not only supported but initiated connections between deafness and another of the cultural forums, television. This shows not only the disparity between audio and audio-visual cultural forums regarding accessibility and suitability, but also the recognition by deaf organisations that connections between certain groups and media could be forged. The contested nature of radio was also significant as the NID, having dismissed it as of no interest, would shift later in the century to focus on those who could use assistive technology to access the audio elements of cultural forums. This demonstrates that influential organisations could shape the discussion of new technologies.

The mainstream press, as mentioned, took some interest in developments in the deaf community regarding radio. *The Manchester Guardian*, who often commented on deaf matters, even went as far as to question why no wireless for the deaf fund existed, as it did for blind people. Additionally, in my searches in newspaper archives, I found that deafness was often used as a metaphor and occasionally as a tool to illustrate other stories: for example, concerns about modern noise and new music styles. The NID also used mainstream media, including radio, making radio appeals aimed at hearing audiences for funds and awareness of deafness as a condition. Therefore, engagement with radio in the deaf community was not necessarily between deaf and hard of hearing individuals and the medium but between hearing people and the structures around it.

Other than publishing occasional letters, the editorial teams of deaf journals and officials involved in deaf organisations made little reference to radio. However, cinema, which transitioned from a (primarily) visual to an audio-visual cultural forum, exposed how

different actors mediated emerging cultural forums differently. As covered in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, this again highlighted the divisions being brought to the fore as the century progressed and how these divisions increased through discussion of cultural forums.

The NID and BDA, as well as prominent deaf journals, reported widely on silent film. As mentioned in the previous section, how often deaf and hard of hearing people attended silent film viewings is difficult to measure. What is apparent is that those documenting the deaf communities' activities were keen to discuss and promote it as a boon to deaf people. It was celebrated in reports and framed as a solution to the challenges faced by deaf and hard of hearing people as radio and telephones became commonplace in everyday British life. In Chapter Four, I reveal that *The BDT* went so far as to claim that silent films were helping to raise the profile of elements of deafness, for example, lipreading and gesture.

However, deaf organisations hope that silent film would foster a growing understanding of deafness, and that there would be a united cinema audience made up of people with a diverse range of hearing, were not expressed in mainstream press reporting. For example, the 1921 cartoon joking about older adults' hearing and silent cinema.

DQN and *DN*, closely connected to the BDA and uninterested in many matters of sound, did not report on cinema often, other than BDA official Leslie Edward's silent Cinema Scheme. The *BDT*, however, did often comment, especially when talkies were introduced. They dismissed them not only for the deaf community but for all audiences. In the 1930s journals, the BDA and NID universally used the introduction of talkies as a means through which to highlight the discrimination and exclusion deaf and hard of hearing people faced. The BDA strongly backed the Cinema Scheme, framing talkies as a cultural forum that was not for use by deaf people, encouraging separate audiences. In the 1940s, the NID began to take a very different approach, embracing sound and assistive technology within the deaf and hard of hearing community, as I revealed in Chapter Five. The introduction of their magazine, *The Silent World*, highlighted this as it published articles on a range of subjects, including hearing loss, tinnitus, and assistive technology. Regular pieces on film and the NIDs campaign to improve assistive technology in cinemas demonstrated how organisations and journals tried to present talkies as something appreciated and engaged with by large parts of the deaf and hard of hearing community. Coverage of the focus groups, and the enthusiastic involvement of cinema management, again framed the discussion of talkies as a positive development for those who could and wanted to use assistive aids.

The division between the BDA and NID on film matters demonstrated how deaf people's engagement with a cultural forum could be mediated through institutions. It also highlighted disagreements on how deaf and hard of hearing people should engage with how cultural forums were developing, from a consensus on the radio in the 1920s to division on cinema matters from the 1930s onwards. The volume and framing of articles on cinema in deaf journals also demonstrate how those in control of what was published within the deaf community could present how they wanted deaf and hard of hearing people's engagements to be recorded and considered by the hearing public.

This was again evident in Chapter Six regarding the Television for the Deaf Fund, as the NID tried to portray television as a cultural medium ideally suited to deaf and hard of hearing people and presented how they should engage with it. The editorial team of *TSW*, and by proxy the NID, tapered off cinema coverage as the 1950s progressed, replacing it with television. The NID, and reporting in the mainstream press, delivered a narrative of television as ideally suited for hearing loss and reported high levels of engagement in the deaf community. However, the sound element of the forum was dismissed by the NID, demonstrating that they attempted to mediate the idea of total engagement across the deaf and hard of hearing community. Accessible *Children's Hour* BBC broadcasts also highlighted how both organisations mediated deaf people's engagement, as methods of communication such as lipreading and textual cues were used rather than sign language. The use of these methods again highlights divisions in the deaf community, as the communication methods of some were prioritised over others.

Direct parallels between the Wireless for the Blind Fund and Television for the Deaf were deliberately drawn by the NID, emphasising that they tried to present it as an equally worthy cause, attempting to legitimise deafness as a cause worthy of sympathy and funds. The reluctance of NID officials to address the issue of sound in television also affirms this. The NID recognised how those involved with the Wireless for the Blind Fund were able to encourage blind people to use radio and the public to support their use of the forum. However, the NIDs initiatives regarding television also exposed that any attempt to present a cultural forum as ideally suited to all community members was challenging due to the deep divisions being forged within the deaf community. By 1960, the NID and BDA took very different stances on these cultural forums. The sound elements of radio, cinema, and

television excluded profoundly deaf people, who the BDA catered to as the NID focused on hard of hearing individuals. Deaf publications were also divided, and mainstream press coverage of the television for the deaf schemes left out those who were excluded and the tensions arising in the deaf community.

Deaf and hard of hearing people's engagement with emerging cultural forums was heavily mediated from 1925-1960. This was done through organisations either dismissing or encouraging participation with specific forums and whether they allotted resources to providing deaf and hard of hearing people with access. The number of column inches devoted to the cultural forums in deaf journals also demonstrated what engagement levels and methods were being encouraged. Similarly, the mainstream press coverage from the time reflects the opinions of spokespeople for the deaf community. Therefore, their ideas on engagement with the cultural forum were presented to the hearing public as reality. Whilst the fact that engagement was mediated remains consistent throughout the early to mid-twentieth century, divisions in the deaf community meant that multiple different groups, which were correlated with different types of deafness and deaf identity, were simultaneously mediating engagement in different ways. This mediation also impacted how deafness was perceived as well as the cultural forums within the deaf community and beyond.

7.1iii. How did the discourse around new cultural forums shape concepts of deafness and hearing loss?

The sector of the deaf community targeted by those mediating engagement with a cultural forum shaped how particular types of deafness and identity were formed. This also demonstrated how the co-construction of these two elements goes beyond a simple binary of new forums being either disabling or enabling due to the high diversity and variety of experiences amongst deaf and hard of hearing people. By approaching this topic from a social constructionist standpoint, it is evident that, between 1925 and 1960, both ideas of deafness and the three cultural forums were shaped and transformed by those engaging in discourse about their relationship with one another. Both deafness and radio, cinema, and television were co-constructed around each other as ideas about engagement and methods of use were debated. In the late nineteenth century the British deaf community was presented by deaf organisations and media as, loosely connected group of people ranging from profoundly deaf

to hard of hearing.[808] Historians Esme Cleall and Neil Pemberton have established that in nineteenth-century Britain, deaf people built communities around schools, churches, missionaries and institutions.[809] As tools of measuring hearing and assistive hearing devices developed in the early twentieth century, however, new thresholds of deafness were established, fracturing the community, and laying the foundations for what would become distinct D/deaf identities later in the century. The discourse surrounding the three cultural forums I have explored also contributed to this, as individuals with different types of deafness and preferences engaged with or rejected them in different ways. By 1960, the mediation of engagement with the cultural forums and responses both within and outside of the British deaf community revealed fractures in the community and diversity in how the forums were perceived.

In Chapter Two, my analysis of the Wireless for the Blind Fund from the 1920s onwards demonstrated how technology and sensory diversity was co-constructed: officials of the campaign constructed radio as a pseudo-prosthetic for blind people. It was framed as an aural alternative to reading fiction and news and could be used as an educative device, an 'ideal' technology for blind people. Simultaneously, discussion around the technology and its use shaped ideas of blindness. Whilst some of the rhetoric around blind people during the campaign was paternalistic and aimed at gathering sympathy, it did focus on blind people as capable when provided with the proper assistance and as having a desire to 'overcome' their disability. This language is entrenched in ableism; however, by including heroic veterans and repeating aims of education and participation in civic life via wireless broadcasts, those initiating the campaign held up blind people as moral, intelligent citizens. I uncovered the significance of this campaign whilst examining sources relating to deafness, as the fund was consistently cited as something deaf organisations should emulate or as an example of how blindness as a cause was offered more political and public sympathy. The co-construction of radio and blindness directly inspired how deaf organisations, namely the NID, latched on to audio-visual technologies later in the century in an attempt to connect cultural forums with deafness in the public imagination, similar to that between radio and blindness. This

[808] Graeme Gooday and Karen Sayer, *Managing the Experience of Hearing Loss in Britain, 1830-1930* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.17.
[809] Esme Cleall, *Colonising Disability: otherness and impairment across Britain and its empire, c. 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 148-179.
Neil Pemberton, 'Deafness and Holiness: Home Missions, Deaf Congregations, and Natural Language 1860-1890', *Victorian Review*, 35 (2009), 65-82 (pp. 65-82).

connection would help provide access to media technologies and publicise the cause of deafness.

Between the 1920s and mid-1940s, the NID was primarily preoccupied with observing and advising deaf people on the commercial production and sale of hearing aids, as explored in Chapter Three. As such, they dismissed radio outright as being useless to deaf people. However, I have established that radio use in the deaf community was contested, as some people could use it through assistive technology. This established radio as a divisive technology, as some people were able to and desired to use it, and others could or would not. The complexity of how deaf and hard of hearing people, and the institutions within their communities, engaged with or rejected radio highlighted why, when media technologies with visual elements such as cinema and television became widespread, deaf organisations such as the NID seized the opportunity to provide access and set up campaigns that would provide much-needed publicity. The differing responses to radio revealed how those with authority shaped radio as not for use by deaf people or not as great a priority as other matters. In turn, deafness was confirmed as an exclusionary factor from participating in popular audio technologies. However, alternative views that radio could be of some use revealed that new thresholds were being created, shaping deafness as diverse and moving beyond a hearing or not hearing binary. Hence the discussion of radio within the deaf community shaped new divisions.

In Chapters Four and Five, I uncovered how these divisions became more apparent in the 1930s. A key intervention that I make in this thesis was to acknowledge the sound aspect of silent film, something previously ignored in sources from the era and later Deaf scholarship.

Silent film was constructed as a cultural forum which held special significance for the deaf community. Deaf organisations and journals promoted it as a medium ideally suited for deaf and hard of hearing people, whilst deaf people were simultaneously constructed as grateful recipients who had been excluded from other cultural phenomena such as the gramophone, radio, and theatre performances. Within organisations such as the NID and BDA, as well as the editorial teams of deaf journals, silent film was written about with great optimism. The accessibility of the forum was promoted, as was its use of gesture, which they hoped would problematise the dominance of speech and promote sign language as a form of communication. Through applying histories of silent film beyond a deaf history lens, however, it has become apparent that silent film did contain sound elements. Therefore,

whilst deaf people could follow silent films, they did not have identical experiences to hearing audiences, as members of the deaf community had reported. Accessibility issues related to going to a cinema showing – for example, the communication required to purchase tickets – were also not commented on.

The alternative offered by the BDA, Leslie Edward's Cinema Scheme, consisted of silent film showings at deaf institutions. The Cinema Scheme was popular within the deaf community. However, deaf audiences were not large and prominent enough for the film industry to continue making silent films, and the scheme ended in 1944. These events demonstrate how cinema, when silent, was constructed within the deaf community as the miraculous answer to centuries of exclusion from entertainment. However, once the speech was introduced, elements of the deaf community rejected its use, as they had with the radio. Instead, cinema would remain silent and exclusively for deaf audiences within deaf environments such as institutions and clubs. This meant that deafness was initially constructed as no barrier to being part of a cinema audience. Still, due to the popularity of talkies amongst those who were hearing, deaf people became an entirely separate audience, drawing firm lines between hearing and deaf audiences. As well as being divided on matters of sign language and oralist education, when exploring the BDA and NID's diverse responses to talkies, it is clear that the use of technology was also a point of contention.

By the 1950s, the NID had a radically different approach to the BDA. The organisation had shifted to focus on assistive technology and sound. As such, they highly supported the government Medresco hearing aid and focused mainly on those who could use assistive technology to access sound. The BDA, meanwhile, continued to cater to those who communicated primarily through sign language. The NID supported talkie cinema, often publishing news about it in their journal *TSW*. Their cooperation with Circuit Management Cinemas Ltd on the campaign to promote and improve assistive aids in cinemas demonstrated that the organisation constructed the medium as something deaf and hard of hearing people should engage with. Meanwhile, deaf and hard of hearing people were asked to participate in focus groups to improve and develop the assistive technology, shaping them as a group who were both valued and desired to join in experiences dominated by hearing audiences. For those in the deaf community outside of these events, talkie cinema continued to be constructed as exclusionary, and their deaf identity as distinct from hearing people.

In the 1940s and 1950s the different approaches of the NID and BDA dramatically highlighted how cinema was constructed within different areas of deaf and hard of hearing communities, as well as the thresholds of deafness being constructed around cinema. For those who could not or did not want to engage with talkies, older silent films and audiences made up entirely of other deaf people were the solution. Meanwhile, those with enough hearing and the desire to engage with talkies were offered alternatives, and an effort was made to integrate them into mainstream audiences. New lines of who was and was not able to engage with a popular cultural forum were drawn, signalling different levels of deafness and hearing loss.

Cinema was largely dropped by the NID as a cause when television became a viable alternative. In the mid-1950s, they considered it a cultural forum that they could potentially connect with deafness in the public mind. In Chapter Six, I argued that The Television for the Deaf Fund was the NID's opportunity to emulate the Wireless for the Blind Fund of the 1920s. The initiative to provide sets and innovate limited accessible content was highly promoted by the organisation yet ultimately failed in the early 1960s. The NID tried to construct television as an ideal technology for deaf people, as the campaigners behind Wireless for the Blind had done with radio. However, the sound element of the technology remained an issue.

Whilst there are examples of deaf people enjoying access to television, the connection between the two was not successfully made for the public, exemplified by the fact that, unlike with Wireless for the Blind, access was not provided in a parliamentary bill, and there were not enough public donations to run the fund. The short broadcasts for deaf children were an example of media producers, in this case, the BBC, identifying deaf audiences as a valued constituency. However, the methods of accessibility used – title cards and lipreading – aligned with oralist methods of deaf education. Hence, the programmes have been ignored until now by historians of deafness and television. Within the campaign, deaf people were described in a paternalistic manner by the NID as they tried to ramp up sympathy and funds for the initiative. Therefore, deafness was constructed as a severe disability, something Deaf activists would later challenge.

The Television for the Deaf Fund was the culmination of organisations' attempts to connect specific cultural forums and deafness in both public minds and the deaf community from 1925 to 1960. In researching radio, cinema, and television, I have revealed the

complexity of deaf people's engagement or lack of engagement with the technologies. Radio was rejected by those claiming to represent deaf people, namely the NID, despite evidence of use by some deaf and hard of hearing people. The Wireless for the Blind Fund demonstrated that connections between a technology and a specific group were possible and why parts of the deaf community were enthusiastic about solidifying connections between deafness and audio-visual technologies when the opportunity arose.

Cinema and the vast diversity in the responses to it within the deaf community highlighted that there was no single example of technology and deafness being co-constructed. The variations in deaf and hard of hearing peoples' bodily and social experiences meant that, as seen in the different responses of the NID and BDA, multiple narratives arose. Both cinema as a cultural forum, and ideas of deafness, were shaped differently depending on whether access to sound was available or even desired. Television was offered as a solution to the multiplicity of deaf people's experiences, with the visual element being promoted and the audio element dismissed. Whilst having some success within the deaf community, the scheme's failure showed that ideas of deafness and cultural forums could not always be successfully constructed and accepted by people outside the deaf community.

Furthermore, I have tracked significant connections between how each forum was constructed within deaf communities and that these shaped perceptions of different hearing capacities. The co-construction of the cultural forums and ideas of deafness was a reciprocal process through which deaf organisations, journals and the mainstream press mediated how and if the cultural forums should be engaged with. In turn, fractures were highlighted within the British deaf community as some were excluded whilst others could access the forums.

7.1iv. Cultural forums and the evolution of the British D/deaf community

In the 1960s and 1970s, the British D/deaf community underwent radical changes. As Gooday and Sayer set out in their work on hearing loss in the nineteenth century, the term deaf referred to a large, heterogeneous group of people whose hearing, or deafness, ranged from those who were hard of hearing to profoundly deaf individuals.[810] However, by the end of the twentieth century, the D/deaf community had fractured into multiple, complex, and often intersecting identities. These identities include separate deaf and Deaf identities, as

[810] Gooday and Sayer, pp. 17-28.

explored by many scholars of D/deafness and disability, including Paddy Ladd, Irene Leigh and many more.[811]

Disability and D/deaf activism increased in the later decades of the twentieth century. Ideas of disability and D/deafness as socially constructed were discussed and promoted by those involved in the campaigns for equality and accessibility.[812] Access to various cultural forums was one of the issues raised by D/deaf activists in Britain. Therefore, the changes that the D/deaf and hard of hearing community underwent in the period covered in this thesis serve as a backdrop to later identities, ideologies, and events. The discourse and construction of deafness and the cultural forums raised subjects including exclusion, accessibility, assistive technology, segregated audiences and more. By undertaking a systematic study of multiple groups within the deaf community and three cultural forums, I have contributed to a body of work that has either neglected these topics or focused on them from singular perspectives. In doing this, I have uncovered events and discussions that add background and depth to later developments regarding the nature of the British D/deaf community and its complex relationship to various cultural forums.

7.2. Approaches and challenges

In their respective works on deafness, leisure, and culture in Britain, Martin Atherton and Peter Jackson neglected to investigate critical aspects of these topics and took overly simplistic approaches.[813] Neither considered the diversity of the deaf community nor how individual engagement, and the different groups within the deaf community, were mediated and constructed. Similarly, they either fail to mention, or date considerably later in the century, deaf people's engagement with radio, cinema, and television, for which I have found a good deal of evidence.

---

[811] Irene Leigh, *A Lens on Deaf Identities*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 4.
Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture – In Search of Deafhood* (Clevedon, Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2003), p. xvii.
[812] Mike Oliver, 'The Social Model of Disability: Thirty Years On', *Disability and Society*, 28 (2013), 1024-1026 (p. 1024-1026).
[813] Martin Atherton, *Deafness, Community and Culture in Britain: Leisure and Cohesion*, 1945-1955 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).
Peter W Jackson, *Britain's Deaf Heritage* (Haddington: Pentland Press, 1990).

By building on innovative approaches to the history of D/deafness and hearing loss developed in the past 15 years, I have uncovered previously ignored nuances and complexities relating to D/deaf people's engagement with technology. In recent years scholars such as Irene Leigh, Graeme Gooday, Karen Sayer, Jaipreet Virdi and Coreen McGuire have made new inroads in exploring D/deaf and hard of hearing people's relationship to science and technology. Their work goes beyond previous Deaf scholarship to include the wide variety of deafness and diverse experiences within the deaf community.

Throughout this thesis, Coreen McGuire's approach has been a significant source of inspiration for my work.[814] Like McGuire, I am drawing on the theories that both technology and ideas of deafness are socially constructed. By combining these two theories, we have both put forward new narratives that uncover their co-construction and the significance of this in terms of access and participation. Some of our conclusions are similar, for instance, that the co-construction of D/deafness and technology did take place in the twentieth century. Unlike in McGuire's work, however, it is apparent that whilst hard of hearing people were partly able to secure the telephone they wanted, the D/deaf community were for the most part not able to campaign for access to the cultural forums in the early to mid-twentieth century.

Whilst it is impossible to examine all the hugely diverse experiences within the deaf community, I wanted to highlight the complexity and considerable variations in individuals' experiences and how they were treated regarding access to radio, cinema, and television. My archival work showed evidence of connecting themes and ideas between the three cultural forums, inspiring an approach that investigated multiple technologies over four decades. Exploring multiple technologies meant that I could uncover how the discussion of each of the three cultural forums related to each other. For example, the exclusion from radio meant that cinema was celebrated. Still, the division in opinion on cinema meant that immense importance was placed on television as a 'perfect' technology for deaf and hard of hearing people. In studying technologies that contained audio and – in the case of cinema and television – visual aspects, I have considered the importance of multi-sensory experiences with technology and how both elements can be exclusionary or inclusionary.

---

[814] Coreen McGuire, 'Inventing Amplified Telephony: The Co-Creation of Aural Technology and Disability', in *Rethinking Modern Prosthesis in Anglo-American Commodity Cultures, 1820-1939*, ed. by Claire L Jones (Manchester, Michigan: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 70-90 (pp. 70-90).
Coreen McGuire, *Measuring Difference, Numbering Normal, Setting the Standards for disability in the interwar period* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

Using primary sources from various perspectives within and outside of the deaf community, I uncovered the many different forms that the discussion and debate surrounding deaf people's engagement with radio, cinema, and television took. Radio was dismissed by many within the deaf community, whilst how deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with cinema was constructed differently by the NID and BDA. This demonstrated clear divisions in attitudes and opinions. Examining mainstream newspaper reports on deafness and the technologies also meant that I could compare how developments were reported both within and outside the deaf community.

My approach will help to diversify ableist histories of technology. Considering bodily, especially sensory, diversity offers new ways of thinking about technology and concepts such as accessibility, use and non-use, and identity formation. It highlights the importance of examining D/deaf and disabled peoples' use, rejection or exclusion from new technologies and how inaccessible technologies are still developed and taken up by different groups. My approach also leaves space to examine the emotional impact of technologies, for example, why D/deaf and hard of hearing people may be attached to one method of accessibility over another.

This thesis was researched and written in 2018-2022, so it has been unavoidably affected by the Covid-19 (coronavirus) pandemic and the safety precautions from 2020 onwards. One of the most significant losses was the permanent closure of the Action on Hearing Loss Library in London, which offered a vast volume of materials under one roof and expertise and insight that was not replicated in larger archives such as the British Library. The archive closure is a reminder of the challenges the D/deaf community faces in preserving its history when support is not forthcoming and the importance of platforming sources relating to D/deaf people in larger archives.

The Covid-19 pandemic also highlighted pertinent themes around technology and accessibility for D/deaf and disabled people. For example, face coverings hindered communication for D/deaf and hard of hearing people who relied on lipreading.[815] Many were severely affected by the pandemic, and a lack of consideration for their experiences and their feedback demonstrated challenges in the fight for equality and accessibility. As work, socialisation, and entertainment became almost entirely virtual in 2020, discussion of the

[815] RNID, 'Face coverings: how the regulations apply to you', *RNID* <https://rnid.org.uk/information-and-support/face-coverings-how-the-regulations-apply-to-you/> [accessed 1 December 2022].

importance of subtitling, self-description and sign language came to the fore. A campaign titled 'Where is the Interpreter?' was initiated by British Sign Language users early in the pandemic, as the British government, unlike the Scottish government, failed to provide interpreters at televised coronavirus briefings or accessible information on the pandemic to D/deaf people.[816]

7.3. Exploring future projects

There are several areas of this thesis that I would have liked to explore further. However, I am hopeful that fellow historians or I will be able to undertake such work in future. As well as ideas on how to develop the research in this thesis, many projects could build upon the work I have done. While not conclusive, I will briefly set out ideas for future work that could contribute positively to the field of study. They fall roughly into three categories: exploring a broader range of technologies, a wider geographical scope, and a greater social range.

I focused on radio, cinema, and television, as I found abundant evidence of them relating to D/deaf matters; however, they are just some of the many sound technologies discussed in archival and newspaper sources. Coreen McGuire has worked on the telephone, and I briefly mention air raid warning sirens in Chapter Three. More work could be done on these as well as other audio technologies.[817] For example, within the NID scrapbooks, there are articles on the alternatives that D/deaf and hard of hearing people found for alarms. These include visual alternatives, such as flashing lights, and tactile solutions such as vibrations, for fire alarms, baby monitors, doorbells, and announcements in public areas. An investigation could be done into how deaf and hard of hearing people accepted or rejected these, the commercial element of the technologies, and, in line with this thesis and other work, how ideas of deafness and technology shaped each other.

Deaf and hard of hearing people's experiences with the hardware of technology have preoccupied much of this thesis. Work could still be done on the representation of D/deafness

[816] #WhereIsTheInterpreter, 'COVID -19 pandemic has brought additional disadvantage and discrimination to sign language community in the UK', #WhereIsTheInterpreter < https://whereistheinterpreter.com/about/> [accessed 1 December 2022].
[817] McGuire, 'Inventing Amplified Telephony', (2017).
McGuire, *Measuring Difference, Numbering Normal,* (2020).

and hearing loss in the content of radio, cinema, and television. Whilst such research exists within media studies, I suggest placing it in the context of this thesis, simultaneously exploring representations, access to the technology, and D/deaf people's responses. It would also be interesting to explore whether individual responses aligned with how D/deaf institutions, organisations and publications responded, again offering the opportunity to examine the diversity of D/deaf and hard of hearing people's experiences. Media content and how those producing it both internalise and project conceptions of D/deafness is also valuable for investigating how deafness is constructed and altered.

Whilst I have tried not to be reductive in my approach to audio technologies regarding sensory experiences, I have focused almost entirely on sound and vision and how these two factors relate to each other. One of the conclusions of this research is that for accessibility to be achieved for a diverse range of people, a multi-sensory approach needs to be taken. Future work could explore the tactility of sound and the importance of touch in technologies. This would open avenues for exploring deaf-blind people's experiences with new technologies and other conditions and disabilities.

A perspective I could not explore extensively within this research is the organisations outside of the deaf community that designed, produced, and marketed radio, cinema, and television, as well as the content made for them. For example, the role of the BBC could be further investigated, as well as commercial companies. This would give a broader idea of how deafness was considered or ignored in these organisations and the input deaf and hard of hearing people had. Inspired by McGuire's work on the telephone, it would also be interesting to look for evidence of how individuals adapted radio, cinema, and television and how personal adaptation tips were spread through communities. Similarly, it is pertinent to ask whether deaf and hard of hearing people had any presence in the industries connected to the technologies, such as in the roles of designers, producers, or content makers.

I have taken a broad approach with this thesis to demonstrate the themes and connections across various cultural forums and types of D/deafness and hearing loss, leaving a tremendous amount of scope to elaborate on almost every element, including each technology and kind of D/deafness. There are developments in the topic in the decades following the era of this thesis to the present day. Focusing on these developments could also contribute to disability, D/deaf, technology and media histories. Regrettably, whilst gender and class are raised within this thesis, I am aware that the actors and perspectives within the

sources and my analysis are primarily white, male, and middleclass. Subsequently, in future work, I will expand my focus to explore other overlapping matters of gender, identity, race, sexuality, religion, and nationality.

Additionally, to a large extent this work has focused heavily on English people and perspectives. I could add greater nuance by investigating the topic in Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Wales. Further transnational research would also be helpful and help build a global body of work on D/deafness, identity, and technology. A colonial and post-colonial lens, such as that explored in part by Rebecca Scales, would also provide further context and detail to the analysis of developments.[818]

Whilst I have tried to include multiple responses to new technology by a diverse range of D/deaf and hard of hearing communities, I have not given much space to the study of those who actively rejected the technologies, either due to inaccessibility or a desire not to engage with them. It would be fascinating to search archives for evidence of D/deaf and hard of hearing people expressing these opinions. Their reasoning and possible alternatives to technologies would offer more variation in D/deaf people's responses to technology in the twentieth century. They would also be a valuable challenge to ableist ideas of technological 'fixes' to D/deafness and disability. A project such as this would contribute, as Sally Wyatt's work on the use and non-use of the internet did, to the rejection of technology as an area of significant study and as a performance of identity.[819]

7.4. Final comments

The project first proposed for this thesis was to explore D/deaf people's engagement with new audio technologies in the twentieth century. However, through my archival work, initially exploring materials relating to purely audio technologies, it quickly became apparent that both audio and audio-visual cultural forums were being discussed within the British deaf community from 1925-1960. How discussion of radio, cinema, and television related to each other and the massive variety of opinions and experiences surrounding them proved a fruitful, multifaceted topic to research. It also shines light on disability and D/deaf history beyond industry, education and medicine, focusing on entertainment, culture and leisure.

---

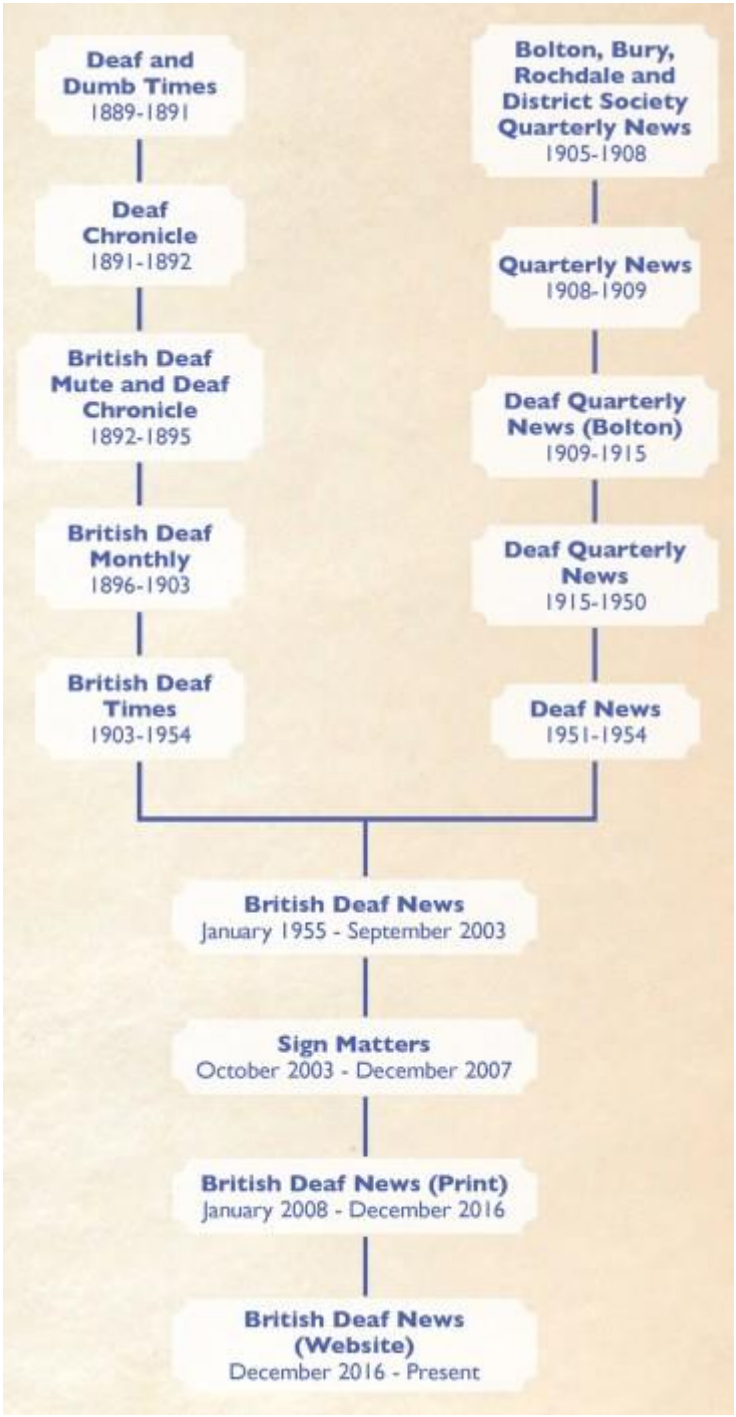
[818] Rebecca Scales, *Radio and the Politics of Sound in Interwar France, 1921-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[819] S. Wyatt, 'Non-Users Also Matter: The Construction of Users and Non-Users of the Internet' in N. Oudshoorn and T. Pinch (eds), *How Users Matter – The Co-Construction of Users and Technology* (2005).

How deaf and hard of hearing people engaged with cultural forums changed and became more diverse as the forums developed, connecting with different groups as the era progressed. The diversity of the deaf community, regarding both levels and types of deafness, as well as opinions on different methods of accessibility, were also exposed through archival research. The NID, BDA, and editorial teams of deaf journals mediated the cultural forums in increasingly diverse ways, attempting to associate the deaf community with some aspects of these cultural forums whilst distancing themselves from others. This is reflected in mainstream newspaper sources, as spokespeople from separate areas of the community presented different ideas of both deafness and the cultural forums.

My research has proven that the forums and ideas of deafness and hearing loss shaped each other. However, this took place in different ways across deaf and hard of hearing communities. Furthermore, this co-construction contributed to new thresholds of deafness, accessibility, and identity formation.

Appendix 1

Flow chart of Deaf Journals 1898-2016, taken from the British Deaf News Website, <https://www.britishdeafnews.co.uk/about-bdn/> [accessed 30th September 2022].



Appendix 2

Newspaper Online Archive Searches: ProQuest British Periodicals and The Times Digital Archive

ProQuest: British Periodicals, <https://www.proquest.com/britishperiodicals/index?accountid=14664> [accessed 4 December 2022]

The Times Digital Archive, <https://go.gale.com/ps/start.do?p=TTDA&u=leedsuni> [accessed 4 December 2022].

Terms Searched*	Date Range	Number of Results	
		ProQuest	The Times
'Deaf' and 'Wireless'	1925-1961	457	782
'Deaf and Radio'	1925-1961	468	908
'Deaf and Cinema'	1925-1961	326	613
'Deaf' and 'Film'	1925-1961	643	701
'Deaf' and 'Television '	1940-1961	84	278
'Hard of Hearing' and 'Wireless'	1925-1961	489	18
'Hard of Hearing' and 'Radio'	1925-1961	488	21
'Hard of Hearing' and 'Cinema'	1925-1961	328	22
'Hard of Hearing' and 'Film'	1925-1961	739	23
'Hard of Hearing' and 'Television'	1940-1961	171	6
'Blind' and 'Wireless'	1925-1961	760	2283
'Hospital Radio'	1917-1931	225	60

* Date range of searches 1 January 1925 – 1 January 1962

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archives:

London, Blind Veterans UK Archive Collections:

Printed leaflet titled ‘Let the Blind Hear – the full script of Winston Churchills 1929 Announcement of the Wireless for the Blind Fund’, 1929

The St Dunstan’s Review

The St Dunstan’s Review 28.VII (1922), ‘Wireless – A new hobby for the blind’, p. 12

The St Dunstan’s Review 68.VIII (1922), ‘Is News by Wireless Really Wanted?’, p. 13

The St Dunstan’s Review 69.VII (1922), ‘Wireless at St Dunstan’s’, p. 9

The St Dunstan’s Review 71.VII (1922) ‘Wireless’, p. 19

The St Dunstan’s Review 114.XI (1926), ‘The Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities) Bill – The First Reading’, p. 21

The St Dunstan’s Review 140.XIV (1930) ‘The British Wireless For The Blind Fund’, p. 19

The St Dunstan’s Review 554.XLIX (1965), ‘Wireless’, p. 19

London, British Film Institute Reuben Library:

BFI Conservation centre Multi-Media Vaults, Michael King-Beer, Television and the Deaf – A Private Research Undertaken by Michael King-Beer, B.Sc., F.G.S., 27th March 1949, KING-BEER, Michael 654.197:362.42

London, The British Library Collections:

The British Deaf News

British Deaf News 1.2. (March-April 1955), TH Sutcliffe, ‘Television and the Deaf’, pp. 44-47, PP.1108.bcl

British Deaf News 2.1 (January-February 1957), ‘Service for the Deaf to be Televised’, p. 11, PP.1108.bcl

The British Deaf Times

The British Deaf Times 9.99 (March 1912), 'What Moving Pictures Really Are', pp.17-18, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 10.113 (May 1913), 'The Cinematograph as an Educational Adjunct', p. 115, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 10.116 (August 1913), 'The Cinematograph Joke', p. 185, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 10.117 (September 1913), 'The Theatre of the Deaf', p.202, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 11.221 (January 1914), 'The Future', p. 21, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 11.125 (May 1914), 'How Cinematograph Shows are Produced – An Informing Article About Moving Pictures', p. 114, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 13.145 (January 1916), 'The Deaf and The Cinema', p. 5, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 13.147 (March 1916), 'Cinemas and "Signs" – The Silent Stage Language of the Future', p. 40, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 22.255-56 (March-April 1925), 'The Cinema and The Deaf', p. 26, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 22.255-56 (March-April 1925), 'Mission News', p. 44, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 22.259-60 (July-August 1925), 'The Comedy (?) of Deafness', p. 77, PP. 1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 24.279-80 (March-April 1927), 'Sports Column', p. 42, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 25.297-8 (September-October 1928), 'Our Post Bag – Letter: Pen Friends', p. 112, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 25.299-300 (November-December 1928), J. Perkins, 'Talkies and the Deaf', p. 113, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 27.303-4 (March-April 1929), 'Talkies and the Deaf', p. 26, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 26.303-4 (March-April 1929), 'Deaf Across the Seas', p. 33, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 26.309-10 (September-October 1929), Selwyn Oxley, 'Talking Films and the Deaf', p.101, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 27.313-4 (January-February 1930), James Perkins, 'Chat with our Readers – 'Silent and "Talkie" Films', p. 13, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 27.323-4 (November-December 1930), ‘Gleanings from Far and Near’, p. 130,

The British Deaf Times 27.323-4 (November-December 1930), J. Perkins, ‘Chat with our Readers – Silent Talkie Production’, p. 113, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 28.327-8 (March-April 1931), ‘Deaf Picture-Goers’, p. 27, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 28.335-6 (November-December 1931), E. Bolton, ‘BDDA’s Red Letter Week’, p. 22, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 29.339-40 (March-April 1932), ‘Overseas Page’, p. 31, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 29.341-2 (May-June 1932), ‘The Deaf and Talkies’, p. 63, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 29.343-44, (July-August 1932), ‘Chat With Our Readers – Do You Broadcast?’, p. 85, PP. 1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 31.365-6, (May-June 1934), ‘Gleanings From Far and Near’, p. 54, PP. 1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 33.385-6 (January-February 1936), ‘Silent Films for the Deaf’, p. 16, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 35.411-2 (March-April 1938), ‘Gleanings from Far and Near’, p. 28-29, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 35.411-2 (March-April 1938), ‘Films for the Deaf’, p. 34, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 35.411-2 (March-April 1938), J. Perkins, ‘Chat with our Readers’, p. 37, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 35.413-4 (May-June 1938), ‘Gleanings from Far and Near’, p. 53, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 36.423-24 (March-April 1939), ‘Chat With Our Readers’, p. 37, PP. 1108.BCD

*The British Deaf Time*s 36.427-28 (July-August 1939), ‘Scheme to Warn Deaf of Night Air Raid’, p. 90, PP. 1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 37.433-34 (January-February 1940), ‘Gleanings from Far and Near’, p. 3, pp. 1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 37.437-38 (May-June 1940), ‘Gleanings from Far and Near’, p. 52, PP. 1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 37.437-38 (May-June 1940), ‘Gleanings from Far and Near’, p. 54, PP. 1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 38.447-8 (March-April 1941), ‘Our Post Bag – Letter: Advice to the War Deafened’, p. 24, PP. 1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 42.501-2, (September-October 1945), ‘Our Post Bag – Talking Pictures in Deaf School’, p. 93, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 42.499-500 (July-August 1945), ‘Our Post Bag – Talking Pictures in Deaf Schools’, p. 75, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 43.505-6 (January-February 1946), P. H. Coose, ‘Letter to the Editor – Plea for the Silent Picture’, p. 15, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 44.519-20 (March-April 1947), Alan W. Darlington, ‘Letter to the Editor – A Film Deaf Can Follow’, p. 33, PP.1108.BCD

The British Deaf Times 49.573-74 (September-October 1951), ‘Questions in the House of Commons’, p. 73, PP. 1108.BCD

The Deaf Quarterly News

The Deaf Quarterly News 80 (January-February-March 1925), ‘News’, p. 14, P.P.1108.e

The Deaf Quarterly News 101 (April/May/June 1930), ‘Leslie Edwards’, p.2, P.P.1108.e

The Deaf Quarterly News 102 (July/August/September 1930), ‘News and Notes – Leicester in 1931’, p.14, P.P.1108.e

The Deaf Quarterly News 109 (April/May/June 1932), L. Edwards, ‘BDDA Annual Meeting – Mr. Edwards’ Scheme to Supply Cinema to Every Mission’, p. 8, P.P.1108.e

The Deaf Quarterly News 111 (October/November/December 1932), E. Ayliffe, ‘Editor’s Notes’, p. 2, P.P.1108.e

The Deaf Quarterly News 112 (January/February/March 1933), L. Edwards, ‘The Cinema Scheme’, p. 5, P.P.1108.e

The Deaf Quarterly News 121 (April, May, June 1935), J. Ellis, ‘Television, The Possibilities for the Deaf’, pp. 4-5, P.P.1108.e

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1925, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1926, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1928, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report, 1932-1933, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1935-36, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1938-39, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1940-42, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1943-44, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1944-45, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1945-46, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1947, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1948, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1949, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1950, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1953, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1954, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1955, P.P.1108.cbh

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1958, P.P.1108.cbh

The Silent World

The Silent World 1.1 (June 1946), 'A message from His Grace the Duke of Montrose', p. 3, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 1.1 (June 1946), 'How It Works', p. 20, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 1.1 (June 1946), Gemini, 'Entertainment', p. 22, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 2.6 (November 1947), Paul Dehn, 'Films of the Month', p. 163, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 2.8 (January 1948), 'What's Your Opinion? Aids in Cinemas', p. 25, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 2.11 (April 1948), 'What's Your Opinion – Film Critic', p. 347, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 3.9 (February 1949), 'Film of the Year', p. 259, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 3.11 (April 1949), Winifred Cowell, 'What's Your Opinion – Johnny Belinda' p. 348, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 3.12 (May 1949), Jane Wyman, 'What's Your Opinion', p. 378, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 4.11 (April 1950), 'Captioned Films at Last!', p. 323, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 4.12 (May 1950), 'Great Expectations', pp. 355-9, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 5.4 (September 1950), 'Television…"The Pictures" By Your Fireside' p. 110, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 5.6 (November 1950), 'The 'Radio Doctor Broadcasts', pp. 164-165, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 5.8 (January 1951), Matthew Norgate, 'Films of the Month', p. 238, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 5.8 (January 1951), 'Another Cinema Venture', p. 249, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 5.10 (March 1951), 'Cinema Soiree', pp. 300-301, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 5.11 (April 1951), 'What's Your Opinion? Cinema Aids', p. 247, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 5.12, (May 1951), 'Hearing Aids in Cinemas', pp. 364-5, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 6.2 (July 1951), 'Leeds Learns About Cinema Aids', p. 40, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 6.4 (September 1951), 'A television programme for and about the deaf', p. 115, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 6.5 (October 1951), 'More Cinema Soirees', pp. 138-9, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 6.12 (May 1952), 'Notes and News…From Everywhere', p. 376, P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 7.1 (June 1952), 'Television for Deaf Children', p. 15, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 7.2 (July 1952), 'The Television Experiment', p. 39, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 7.3 (August 1952), 'Communication', p. 71, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 7.3 (August 1952), 'TV Comments', pp. 90-91, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 7.3 (August 1952), 'The Second Television Programme', p. 93, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 7.5 (October 1952), 'Television for the Deaf', p. 136, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 7.8 (January 1953), 'Welcome to 1953', p. 231, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 7.8 (January 1953), 'Notes and News', p. 248, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 7.9 (February 1953), 'A BBC Appeal', p. 263, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 7.9 (February 1953) Jeanne Heal, 'Appeal on behalf of the Television Fund of the National Institute for the Deaf', p. 306, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 8.1 (June 1953), 'A New Volume', p. 3, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 8.1 (June 1953), 'What You Will See', p. 16-19, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 8.5 (October 1953), 'Film Reviews', p. 156, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 8.9 (February 1954), Mrs H. F. Langridge, 'No Radio Voices', p. 284, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 9.1 (June 1954), Ursula Eason, 'The Second Anniversary of Television for Deaf Children', pp. 11-12, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 9.5 (October 1954), R. Cottington, 'Readers Forum – Captioned Films', p. 154-5, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 9.7 (December 1954), Miss P. Winser, 'Readers Forum – Captioned Films', p. 222, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 9.10 (March 1955), A. V. Wilson, 'TV Announcers', p. 313, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 10.3 (August 1955), 'Notes and News', p. 84, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 10.3 (August 1955), 'What's Your Opinion? Readers Forum', p. 86, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 10.4 (September 1955), W. Alford, 'Television for the Deaf', p. 111, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 10.6 (November 1955), 'A Milestone in Appeals', p. 163, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 10.9 (February 1956), 'Thank You BBC', p. 259, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 10.9 (February 1956), 'What's Your Opinion? Readers Forum', p. 287, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 10.11 (April 1956), 'Television for the Deaf', p. 345, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 11.8 (January 1957), 'Television for the Deaf' p. 238, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 11.9 (February 1957), 'Entertainment', p. 259, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 11.9 (February 1957), 'Television for the Deaf', p. 262, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 11.11 (April 1957), 'Television for the Deaf', pp. 336-338, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 11.11 (April 1957), 'Notes and News', p. 344, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 11.12 (May 1957), 'Notes and News', p. 376, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 12.9 (February 1958), What's Your Opinion? Readers Forum', p. 283, P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 12.10 (March 1958), 'Money to View', p. 291, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 12.11 (April 1958), p. 348, 'What's your opinion? Reader's Forum', P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 12.12 (May 1958), 'TV Serials', pp. 282-285, P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 13.7 (December 1958), BBC and the NID', p. 210P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 13.9 (February 1959), 'Deaf Listening', p. 259, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 13.9 (February 1959), 'First Experiments', p. 263, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 13.12 (May 1959), 'More about viewing', p. 355, P.P.1108.bcg

The Silent World 14.3 (October 1959), 'A Service for the Deaf', pp. 128-131, P.P.1108.bcg

London, Kew, The National Archives:

The British Home for Deaf and Dumb Women Annual Report 1922-23, ED 62/50

The British Home for Deaf and Dumb Women Annual Report 1924-25, ED 62/50

London, Royal National Institute for the Blind Archive:

Annual Reports

Royal National Institute for the Blind Annual Report 1926-27

Royal National Institute for the Blind Annual Report 1927-28

Royal National Institute for the Blind Annual Report 1928-29

Royal National Institute for the Blind Annual Report 1930

The New Beacon – A Magazine Devoted to the Interests of the Blind

The New Beacon 10.113 (May 1926), 'Wireless for the Blind', p. 14

The New Beacon 13.148 (April 1929), 'Free Licenses Available', p. 5

The New Beacon 13. 151 (July 1929), L.F., Letter to *The New Beacon*, 'Value of Wireless', p. 7

The New Beacon 13.154 (October 1929), F.W. Storky to The Radio Times, Reprinted in The New Beacon, 'A Wonderful Blessing', p. 4

The New Beacon 13.155 (November 1929), 'Educating the Blind By Wireless', p.1

The New Beacon 14.157 (January 1930), 'British Wireless for the Blind Fund', p. 16

The New Beacon 14.158 (February 1930), 'British Wireless for the Blind Fund', p. 31

The New Beacon 15.170 (February 1930), 'Wireless for the Blind - Review of the Work of the Wireless Fund', p. 30

Correspondence

Sir Beachcroft Towse to Sir Lionel Halsey, 12 March 1936, Royal Family Correspondence 1935-1937 Box 1 76.6 CRO/144 G125

London, The RNID/ Action for Hearing Loss Library:

British Association for the Deaf Annual Reports **-** Relocated to: London, UCL Special Collections, RNID/2/53.

British Deaf Association Annual Report 1932

British Deaf Association Annual Report 1944

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Reports **-** Accessed before the closure of the Action on Hearing Loss Library. A copy of this document can be found in Oxford, The Bodleian Library, Per. 263 d.53 (1960-1961), N10407891.

National Institute for the Deaf Annual Report 1961

RNID Scrapbooks [accessed December 2018] **-** Relocated to: London, UCL Special Collections, RNID Scrapbooks, RNID/3/20/19-22, RNID/3/20/30-3, RNID/3/30/41, RNID/3/20/44

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 'Advantages of Being Deaf – Freedom From Many of Life's Nuisances', 19 January 1938

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Welsh Mail*, 'Care of the Deaf and Dumb – Broadcast Appeal by Lady Mayoress', 28 March 1938

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Yorkshire Evening News*, 'A Civic Visit', 5 November 1938

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Radio Broadcast from Deaf and Dumb Church', 6 November 1938

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Deaf and Dumb Entertained, Idea Started by Coventry M.P.'s Broadcast', 12 December 1938

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Deaf Woman's Ignorance Was Bliss – She Knows That Now – Too Late', 5 January 1939

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'The Moral', 6 January 1939

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *John Bull*, Title Unclear, 21 January 1939

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Deaf and Dumb Society – Music Broadcast from Dance at Torquay', 7 February 1939

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Deaf and Dumb in Industry "Less Liable to Accident", Escape From Crooners and Jazz', 16 April 1939

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Wireless Appeal for Deaf and Dumb', 24 October 1939

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'The Deaf and Films', 17 February 1949

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Yorkshire Evening Press*, 'TV sets urged for Deaf and Dumb', 20 April 1951

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Nottingham Journal*, 'Television is fostering interest in deaf children', 9 May 1951

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Deaf Aid Campaign Launched', 25 May 1951

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Glasgow Citizen*, 'Helping the Deaf', 20 August 1951

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Halifax Weekly Courier, 'No songs of birds', 18 October 1951

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Manchester Evening News*, 'TV Programmes Can Aid The Deaf', 20 October 1951

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *South Wales Echo*, 'They Want TV Sub Titles', 16 November 1951.

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Bradford Telegraph*, 'A Boon To The Deaf', 2 January 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Daily Mirror*, 'TV Try Show for Deaf', 13 Jan 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – News Chronicle, 'Deaf Children's TV Needs Simplifying', 23 Jan 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Cardiff Western Mail*, 'BBC appeal to give deaf TV sets', 5 February 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Birmingham Weekly, Ellen Foxon, 'Theatres and Cinemas', 24 March 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Kinematograph*, '600 Deaf Hear the Talkies', 27 March 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Bath Weekly Chronicle*, '"TV For The Deaf" Is New Slogan – Television Shown at Bath Meeting', 3 May 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Daily Express*, 'Free to See', 27 May 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Daily Mail*, 'Lip-reading Experiment for the Deaf – BBC Plan Lessons on Television', 27 May 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Cambridge Daily News*, 'Deaf-Aids', 30 May 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 'TV For Deaf Children – Experiment Starts on 13 June', 3 June 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Manchester Guardian*, 'Outside Broadcasts', 4 June 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Oldham Evening Chronicle*, 'Deaf-aids', 5 June 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Daily Telegraph*, 'Deaf Children Have TV Show – Experiment In Lip Reading', 14 June 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Kinematograph*, '400 CMA Halls Cater for Deaf Patrons', 19 June 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Radio Times*, 'For the Deaf', 14 November 1952

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Lancaster Evening Post*, 'TV-For-The-Deaf Fund is Planned', 9 January 1953

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Liverpool Post, 'TV A Boon to Deaf and Dumb', 19 January 1953

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Nottingham Guardian*, 'TV for Deaf', 30 January 1953

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Sheffield Telegraph*, 'TV For The Deaf', 31 January 1953

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *News Chronicle,* Title Unclear, 2 February 1953

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Birmingham Post*, 'TV for the Deaf', 4 February 1953

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Yorkshire Observer*, 'Television from Church', 4 February 1953

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Picture Post, J. Bush, 'TV Helps The "Mandy's"', 19 September 1953

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Nottingham Evening Post*, 'Wireless Whispers', Day and Month Unclear, 1953

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *Nottingham Evening Post*, 'Deaf-aid Films', 11 March 1954

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *News Chronicle*, 'Testing Film the Deaf Can Enjoy', 12 April 1954

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *South London Advertiser*, 'To Help the Deaf and Dumb', 21 October 1954

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – *The Yorkshire Observer*, Title Unclear, Date Unclear

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, 'Films for the Deaf', Date Unclear

RNID Scrapbooks, Newspaper Clipping – Publication Unclear, Title Unclear, Date Unclear

Sheffield, Local Studies Library:

The Sheffield Association in Aid of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Annual Report 1930, 362.4 S

The Sheffield Association in Aid of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Annual Report 1932, 362.4 S

The Sheffield Association in Aid of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Annual Report 1939, 362.4 S

Online Resources:

The British Medical Journal:

The British Medical Journal, 'Cinema Deaf-Aid Installation In A School For The Deaf', *The British Medical Journal* 2.4009 (6 November 1937), p. 927

Hansard:

Hansard, Commons Sitting, HC Deb 10 November 1926 vol 199 cc1086-8, 'Wireless Telegraphy (Blind Persons Facilities), *Hansard*, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1926/nov/10/wireless-telegraphy-blind-persons> [accessed 6 October 2021]

Rosenburg, Augustas, 'Improvements in Apparatus for Assisting the Deaf to Hear', *Espacenet Patent Search* <https://worldwide.espacenet.com/publicationDetails/biblio?FT=D&date=19091125&DB=EPODOC&CC=GB&NR=190901420A> [accessed 3 July 2023]

Online Newspaper Archives:

ProQuest: British Periodicals (ProQuest: British Periodicals,

<https://www.proquest.com/britishperiodicals/index?accountid=14664> [accessed 4 December 2022])

Answers 91.15 (26 August 1933), Mrs L. H., 'My Favourite Broadcast – Her Only Experience', p. 26

Fortnightly Review 109.650 (February 1921), 'The Cinema and its Censor', pp. 222-228

The Manchester Guardian (30 January 1924), 'Wireless As Tuberculosis Treatment', p. 4

The Manchester Guardian (5 January 1925), 'Wireless for Workhouse Hospital', p. 11

The Manchester Guardian (18 September 1925), 'Wireless Notes and Programmes: Wireless in Hospitals', p. 11

The Manchester Guardian (23 December 1925), 'Wireless Notes and Programmes: Giving a Choice of Programmes a Special Provision for Hospitals?', p. 11

The Manchester Guardian (3 April 1926), 'Centenarian and did not know it: Birthday Celebration a year late', p. 19

The Manchester Guardian (11 November 1926), 'The Blind Listener', p. 8

The Manchester Guardian (17 August 1927), 'Wireless Sets for Poor-Law Hospitals: Is Board's Expenditure Legal?', p. 10

The Manchester Guardian (25 January 1930), 'Letters to the Editor', p. 9

The Manchester Guardian (9 April 1930), 'Cup Final to be Broadcast: FA and BBC Agree', p. 11

The Manchester Guardian (2 March 1935), 'Wireless and the Deaf: A Lack of Sympathy', p. 10

The Manchester Guardian (6 March 1935), '"The Deaf Listener": Headphones', p. 6

The Observer (12 October 1930), A. H. Fox., 'Music and Musicians: The BBC and its Critics', p. 14

Picture Show 30.780 (14 April 1934), 'Deaf?', p. 27

Picture Show 53.1376 (13 August 1949), 'Entertainment, Not Education', p. 14

Picture Show 53.1388, (5 November 1949), 'In Favour of Educational Films', p. 14

Picture Show 58.1514 (5 April 1952), Edith Nepean, 'Round the British Studios: Scenes From "Mandy"', p. 11

The Sketch 217.2814 (13 August 1952), 'Mandy', p. 156

The Sphere 48.627 (27 January 1912), V.V.V., 'A Few Days Ago: A Random Chronicle', p. 130.

The Sphere 100.1303 (10 Jan 1925), 'The Newsletter Week by Week', p. 30

The Sphere 107.1400 (22 November 1926), 'Deafness: Xmas Without Hearing is Unthinkable', p. *f*

The Sphere 114.1486 (14 June 1928), 'Deafness: A Social Barrier Removed', p. 51

The Sphere 120.1563 (4 January 1930) 'Wireless for the Blind', p. 36

The Tatler and Bystander 75.974 (25 February 1920), Cartoon titled 'Wasted' by George Belcher, p. 239

The Tatler and Bystander 104.1349 (4 May 1927), 'Notes from here and there', p. xxvi

The Tatler and Bystander 190.2477 (29 December 1948), Freda Bruce Lookhart, 'At The Pictures: Thank Your Stars' p. 404

ProQuest: New York Times (ProQuest: New York Times, <https://www.proquest.com/publication/45545?OpenUrlRefId=info:xri/sid:primo&accountid=14664> [accessed 5 December 2022])

The New York Times (9 January 1929), 'Talkie Captions Asked by Deaf', p. xx4

The New York Times (2 April 1929), 'Deaf to Protest Sound Films: Urge Nation-Wide Petitions', p. 13

The Times Digital Archive (The Times Digital Archive, <https://go.gale.com/ps/start.do?p=TTDA&u=leedsuni> [accessed 4 December 2022])

The Times, Issue 43145 (25 September 1922), 'Wireless Concerts For the Wounded', p. 8

The Times, Issue 43354 (30 May 1923), 'The London Hospital – Response to Broadcast Appeal', p. 15

The Times, Issue 43408 (1 August 1923), E.V. Lucas 'The Cinema', p. 11

The Times, Issue 43978 (3 June 1925), 'Wireless in London Hospitals – Listening in Apparatus for the Wards', p. 17.

The Times, Issue 43997 (25 June 1925), 'Wireless for Hospitals Fund', p. 8

The Times, Issue 44075 (24 September 1925), 'Wireless in London Hospitals', p. 6

The Times, Issue 44075 (24 September 1925), 'Wireless in Hospitals', p. 13

The Times, Issue 44133 (1 December 1925), 'Broadcasting and the National Life – Postmaster General on a Growing Factor', p. 25

The Times, Issue 44167 (12 January 1926), 'Wireless a boon for Hospital Patients' p. 17

The Times, Issue 44228 (24 March 1926), 'Wireless Sets for Hospitals', p. 13

The Times, Issue 44419 (3 November 1926), 'Wireless in Hospitals – Daily News Scheme Completed', p. 11

The Times, Issue 44431 (17 November 1926), 'Wireless for Deaf Mutes' p. 10

The Times, Issue 44433 (19 November 1926), 'Wireless for Deaf Mutes', p. 10

The Times, Issue 44438 (25 November 1926), 'Wireless for the Deaf' p. 19

The Times, Issue 44443 (1 December 1926), 'The Deaf and Wireless' p. 7

The Times, Issue 44448 (7 December 1926), 'Wireless and the Deaf', p. 23.

The Times, Issue 44825 (24 February 1928), 'The Blind Population', p. 8

The Times, Issue 46965 (18 January 1935), 'Wireless for the Deaf – Letter to the Editor', p. 13

The Times, Issue 51259 (20 December 1948), 'New Films in London – Unusual Acting', p. 6

Secondary Literature

Books:

Abramson, Albert, *The History of Television 1880-1941* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1987)

Anderson, Julie, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011)

Atherton, Martin, *Deafness, Community and Culture in Britain: Leisure and Cohesion, 1945-1955* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012)Baynton, Douglas, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996)

Bebber, Brett, ed., *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012)

Chanan, Michael, *The Dream That Kicks – The Prehistory and Early Years of Cinema in Britain*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1996)

Cleall, Esme, *Colonising Disability: otherness and impairment across Britain and its empire, c. 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022)

Cleall, Esme, ed, *Global Histories of Disability*, 1700-2015 (New York: Routledge, 2022)

Cooke, Mervyn, *A History of Film Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

Corner, John, *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: BFI Publishing, 1991)

Deuchar, Margaret. *British Sign Language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984)

Díaz-Cintas, Jorge, Pilar Orero and Aline Remael, eds, *Media for All – Subtitling for the Deaf, Audio Description and Sign Language* (New York: Rodopi, 2007)

Fischer, Renate and Harlan Lane, eds, *Looking Back: A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and their Sign Languages* (Hamburg: Signum Press, 1993)

Grant, Brian, *The Deaf Advance: A History of the British Deaf Association 1890-1990* (Edinburgh: The Pentland Press Ltd., 1990)

Gooday, Graeme and Karen Sayer, *Managing the Experience of Hearing Loss in Britain, 1830-1930* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

Goodey, CF, *A History of Intelligence and "Intellectual Disability": The Shaping of Psychology in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2011)

Hendy, David, *The BBC: A People's History* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2022)

Hilmes, Michele, ed., *The Television History Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2003)

Jackson, Peter W, *Britain's Deaf Heritage* (Haddington: Pentland Press, 1990)

Lacey, Kate, *Listening publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013)

Ladd, Paddy *Understanding Deaf Culture – In Search of Deafhood* (Clevedon, Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2003)

Lane, Harlan, *The Mask of Benevolence – Disabling the Deaf Community* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1992)

Lang, Harry G, *Turn on the Words! Deaf Audiences, Captions and the Long Struggle for Access* (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2021).

Leigh, Irene, *A Lens on Deaf Identities*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Lonsdale, Lord Fraser of, *My Story of St Dunstan's* (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1961)

Mansell, James G, *The Age of Noise in Britain, Hearing Modernity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press2017)

McGuire, Coreen, *Measuring Difference, Numbering Normal, Setting the Standards for disability in the interwar period* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020)

Miller Marks, Martin *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1985-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1997)

Nasta, Sushelia and Mark Stein, eds., *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020)

Oliphant, John, *The Early Education of the Blind in Britain c.1790–1900: Institutional Experience in England and Scotland* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007)

Oswell, David, *Television, childhood, and the home : a history of the making of the child television audience in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002)

Oudshoorn, Nelly, and Trevor Pinch, eds., *How Users Matter – The Co-Construction of Users and Technology* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005)

Parkinson, David, *History of Film* (New York: Thames and Hudson,1995)

Phillips, Gordon, *The Blind in British Society: Charity, State and Community c1780-1930* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2004)

Pocock, Rowland F, *The early British radio industry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988)

Popple, Simon and Joe Kember, *Early Cinema: From Factory Gate to Dream Factory* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004)

Potter, Simon J., *This is the BBC: Entertaining the Nation, Speaking for Britain? 1922-2022* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022)

Rembis, Michael A, Kudlick, Catherine Jean, Neilson, Kim E, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)

Rubery, Matthew, *The Untold Story of the Talking Book* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2016)

Scales, Rebecca, *Radio and the Politics of Sound in Interwar France, 1921-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Scannell, Paddy, and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting Volume One 1922-1939* (Cambridge MA: Basil Blackwell Inc, 1991)

Schwyter, Jürg R, *Dictating the Mob: The History of the BBC Advisory Committee on Spoken English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

Scott, Peter, *The Market Makers – Creating Mass Markets for Consumer Durables in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

Silvey, Robert, *Who's Listening? The Story of BBC Audience Research* (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1974)

Thomas, Pradip Ninan, Information Infrastructures in India (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022)

Thumim, Janet, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women, and The Box* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Thumim, Janet, ed., *Small Screens, Big Ideas: Television in the 1950s* (London: IB Tauris, 2002)

Tuner, David and Blackie, Daniel, *Disability in the Industrial Revolution: Physical Impairment in British Coalmining, 1780–1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press (2018).

Virdi, Jaipreet, *Hearing Happiness: Deafness Cures in History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020).

Wheatley, Helen, ed., *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007)

Zárate, Soledad, *Captioning and Subtitling for d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing Audiences* (London: UCL Press, 2021)

Chapters in Edited Volumes:

Beaven, Brad, 'Going to the cinema: Mass commercial leisure and working-class cultures in 1930s Britain', in *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. by Brett Bebber (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 63-76

Boyd, Kelly, 'The Western and British Identity on British Television in the 1950s', in *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. by Brett Bebber (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 109-115

Creeber, Glen, 'The Origins of Public Service Broadcasting' in *The Television History Book*, ed. by Michele Hilmes (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 23-34

Hendy, David, 'Television's Pre-history: Radio', in *The Television History Book*, ed. by Michele Hilmes (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 4-6

McGuire, Coreen, ‘Inventing Amplified Telephony: The Co-Creation of Aural Technology and Disability’, in *Rethinking Modern Prosthesis in Anglo-American Commodity Cultures, 1820-1939,* ed. by Claire L Jones (Manchester, Michigan: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 70-90

Örnebring, Henrik, ‘Writing the history of television audiences: The Coronation in the Mass-Observation Archive’, in *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography*, ed. by Helen Wheatley (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 173-180

Remael, Aline, ‘Sampling Subtitling for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing on Europe’, *in Media for All – Subtitling for the Deaf, Audio Description and Sign Language*, ed. Jorge Díaz-Cintas, Pilar Orero and Aline Remael (New York : Rodopi, 2007) 23-52

Christopher, ‘Deaf access for Deaf people: the translation of the television news from English into British Sign Language’ in *Media for All – Subtitling for the Deaf, Audio Description and Sign Language,* ed. Jorge Díaz-Cintas, Pilar Orero and Aline Remael (New York: Rodopi, 2007) 71-88

Winston, Brian, ‘The Development of Television’, in *The Television History Book,* ed. by Michele Hilmes (London: British Film Institute, 2003), pp. 9-12

Wyatt, Sally, ‘Non-Users Also Matter: The Construction of Users and Non-Users of the Internet’ in *How Users Matter – The Co-Construction of Users and Technology*, ed. by Nelly Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005) pp. 67-80

Journal Articles:

Andrews, Maggie, ‘Homes Both Sides of the Microphone: the wireless and domestic space in inter-war Britain’, *Women’s History Review*, 21 (2012), 605–621

Ball, Vicky ‘The “Feminization” of British Television and the Re-Traditionalization of Gender’, *Feminist Media Studies* 12 (2012) 248-264

Bates, Victoria ‘‘Humanizing’ healthcare environments: architecture, art and design in modern hospitals’, *Design for Health* 2(2018), 5-19

Bernabo, Laurena, ‘Expanding Television’s Cultural Forum in the Digital Era: Prime Time Television, Twitter, and Black Lives Matter’, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 63 (2019), 63(1), 77–93

Blackie, Daniel and Moncrieff, Alexia, ‘State of the Field: Disability History’, *The Journal of the Historical Association* 107(2022), 789-811

Brooks, Erin M, ‘Silent Film Sound & Music Archive: A Digital Repository’, *Journal of the Society for American Music* 14 (2020), 522-524Burch, Susan and Patterson, Lindsey, ‘Not Just Any Body: Disability, Gender, and History’, *Journal of Women’s History* 25(2013), 122–137

Dolan, Josephine, ‘Aunties and uncles: the BBC’s children’s hour and liminal concerns in the 1920s’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 23 (2003), 329-339

Farr, Jason S, ‘Libertine Sexuality and Queer-Crip Embodiment in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 16(2016), 96–118.

Fullwood, Lee and Levinson, Martin, ‘Fifty years on and still no resolution: Deaf education, ideology, policy and the cost of resistance’, *Teaching and Teacher Education* 129 (2023), 2-12

Hughes, Bill and Kevin Peterson, ‘The Social Model of Disability and the Disappearing Body: Towards A Sociology Of Impairment’, *Disability & Society* 12 (1997) 325–340

Jensen, Klaus Bruhn and Rasmus Helles, ‘The internet as a cultural forum: Implications for research’, *New Media and Society,* 13 (2011) 517–533

Johnson, Russell L, ‘“Better Gestures”: A Disability History Perspective on the Transition from (Silent) Movies to Talkies in the United States’, *Journal of Social History* 51 (2017), 1-26

Leff, Leonard J, ‘What in the World interests Women? Hollywood, Postwar America, and Johnny Belinda’, *Journal of American Studies*, 31 (1997), 385-405

Murphy, Robert, ‘English as she is spoke: The first British Talkies’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 32 (2012), 537-557

Newcomb, Horace and Paul M Hirsch, ‘Television as a Cultural Forum’, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 8 (1983), 45-55

Oliphant, John, ‘Touching the Light: The Invention of Literacy for the Blind’, *Paedagogica Historica,* 44(2008), 67-82

Oliver, Mike, ‘The Social Model of Disability: Thirty Years On’, *Disability and Society*, 28 (2013), 1024-1026

Oswell, David, ‘Early Children’s Broadcasting in Britain: Programming for a Liberal Democracy’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18 (1998), 375-393 (p. 375).

Parker, Stephen G, ‘Teach them to pray Auntie: “Children’s hour prayers” at the BBC, 1940 – 1961’, *History of Education,* 39 (2010), 659–676

Pemberton, Neil, ‘Deafness and Holiness: Home Missions, Deaf Congregations, and Natural Language 1860-1890’, *Victorian Review*, 35 (2009), 65-82

Pinch, Trevor J and Wiebe E Bijker, ‘The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other’, *Social Studies of Science* 14 (1984) 399-441

Porter, Laraine, ‘‘Have you a happy voice?’ Women’s voices and the Talkie revolution in Britain 1929-1932’, *Music, Sound and the Moving Image* 12 (2018), 141-169

Rubery, Matthew, ‘From Shell Shock to Shellac: The Great War, Blindness, and Britain’s Talking Book Library’, *Twentieth Century British History* 26(2015), 1-25

Schuchman, John S, ‘The Silent Film Era: Silent Films, NAD Films, and the Deaf Community’s Response’ *Sign Language Studies* 4 (2004), 231-238

Skelton, Tracy and Gill Valentine, '"It feels normal like being Deaf is normal": An exploration into the complexities of defining D/deafness and young D/deaf people's identities' *Canadian Geographer* 47 (2003), 451-466

Slorach, Roddy, 'Out of the Shadows: Disability Movements', *Critical Radical Social Work*, 2 (2014), 159-174

Sullivan, Evan, 'Sound Citizenship: Hearing and Speech Disabilities in World War I', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 3(2023), 296-318

Tebbutt, Melanie, 'Listening to Youth?: BBC Youth Broadcasts during the 1930s and the Second World War', *History Workshop Journal*, 84 (2017), 214-233

Thaut, Michael H., 'Music as therapy in early history', *Progress in Brain Research* 217(2015), 143-158

Tilley, Heather, 'Frances Browne, "The Blind Poetess": Towards a Poetics of Blind Writing', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 3(2009), 147-161

Virdi, Jaipreet and McGuire, Coreen., 'Phyllis M. Tookey Kerridge and the science of audiometric standardization in Britain', *The British Journal for the History of Science* 51(2018), 138-155

PhD Theses:

McGuire, Coreen 'The 'Deaf Subscriber' and the shaping of the British Post Office's amplified telephones 1911-1939' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, School of Philosophy, Religion and the History of Science, 2016).

Websites:

BBC, '9 Ways Life Has Changed for Deaf People, *BBC* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/ZgRczbRTdsJ4tdWRKTcfFx/9-ways-life-has-changed-for-deaf-people> [accessed 6 December 2022]

British Deaf News, 'About BDN', *British Deaf News* <https://www.britishdeafnews.co.uk/about-bdn/> [accessed 30th September 2022]
British Film Institute, 'Johnny Belinda (1948)', *BFI* < https://www2.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b6ada1534> [accessed 5 December 2022].

Duguid, Mark, 'Mandy (1952)', *BFI Screen Online* <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/443769/> [accessed 5 December 2022]

Gov.UK, 'Assistive technology: definition and safe use', *Gov.UK* < https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assistive-technology-definition-and-safe-use/assistive-technology-definition-and-safe-use> [accessed 1 July 2023]

RNIB, 'Who We Are', *RNIB – See Differently* <https://www.rnib.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are/> [accessed 4 December 2022].

RNID, ‘Face coverings: how the regulations apply to you’, *RNID* <https://rnid.org.uk/information-and-support/face-coverings-how-the-regulations-apply-to-you/> [accessed 1 December 2022]

RNID, ‘Our History’, *RNID* < https://rnid.org.uk/about-us/our-history/> [accessed 18 July 2023]

Stiles, H Dominic W, ‘A.J. Story, Teacher of the Deaf and first secretary of the National Institute for the Deaf’, *UCL Ear Institute & Action On Hearing Loss Libraries* <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/library-rnid/2012/03/16/teacher-of-the-deaf-and-first-secretary-of-the-national-institute-for-the-deaf/> [accessed 5 December 2022].

UCL, ‘BSL Timeline’ *UCL* <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/british-sign-language-history/bsl-timeline> [accessed 20 June 2023].

#WhereIsTheInterpreter, ‘COVID -19 pandemic has brought additional disadvantage and discrimination to sign language community in the UK’, *#WhereIsTheInterpreter* < https://whereistheinterpreter.com/about/> [accessed 1 December 2022]