

DEAF PLACE: WORK

Introduction

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



The tailoring department – Image by Peter Jackson

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

(Chris Steel)

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

(Maureen Jackson)

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

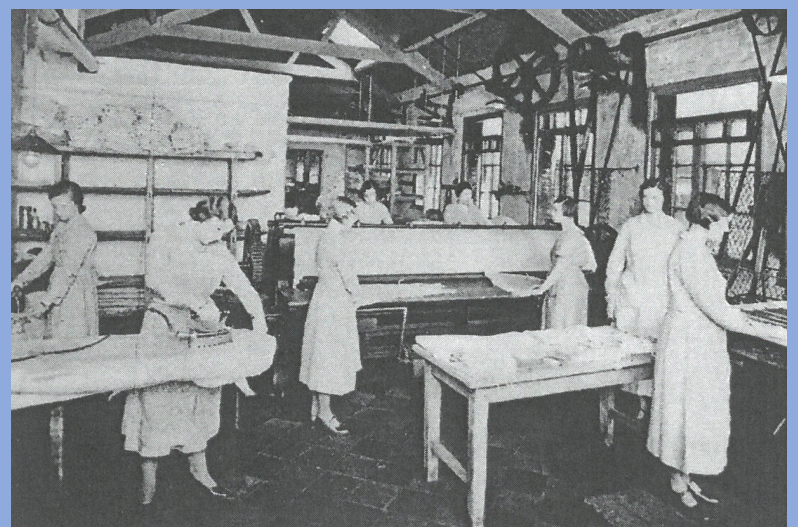
(Shirley Whiteside)

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

(Ian Smith)

The Past

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



The laundry department – Image by Peter Jackson