

## PREFACE

This book began with a request from the Thackray Medical Museum to help with the interpretation of their hearing aid collection, a collection that came largely from the British Society of Audiologists (supplemented by materials from manufacturers) and is arguably the largest in the UK. However, we quickly realised that focusing on hearing aids, while revealing something about the lives of the hard of hearing, failed to encompass other ways in which such people addressed what they experienced as hearing ‘loss’—or the subsequent effects and experiences of that hearing loss as adults. It also became clear, thanks to the work of historians of Deaf people and the Deaf comedian John Smith, that hearing aids acted as markers of hearing lives (as assistive technology for the hearing, not the Deaf): as Smith puts it ‘hearing aids are for the hearing’. Our book is therefore about hearing people, not the Deaf.

Many seminar and conference attendees offered us their own experiences of many types and degrees of experience of hearing loss and told us that this was the first time that many of them had been able to talk about it in a sympathetic environment. From these conversations, it became increasingly clear that the sense of ‘loss’ (the sense of grief associated with the loss of hearing for its own sake, but also for lost ease of communication and connection) to them as hearing people was key. This was reinforced for us both through the personal experience of living with and later supporting parents who had lost part of their hearing at various points in their lives, and through the sense of anxiety experienced in being told that one has already lost some of one’s own hearing.

We chose the period 1830–1930 because the growth in the world of the technological offers for hearing loss, changes in medical interventions, and cultural changes in attitudes to the hard of hearing constituted a phenomenon worthy of historical explanation.

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