

Our Mission Statement as of today reads:

‘Vision Support exists to enhance the quality of life, promote the continuing independence and raise awareness of the needs of vision impaired people of all ages throughout our communities.’

One lady we have recently been in contact with is Sharon Walters. Sharon was diagnosed with a form of corneal macular dystrophy when she was a teenager and her eyesight has continued to deteriorate since. She now uses a white cane for walking and has additional lighting and magnifiers in her home. She finds it very hard to get around and can no longer leave the house at night as she simply wouldn't be able to find her way. Through Vision Support Sharon has been able to find the things she needs to accommodate her sight loss. This includes being introduced to a number of social groups overseen by the charity. She has stated how indispensable the help has been and stressed the importance of a number she can call knowing that someone is willing to help, especially due to the loss of confidence that so often accompanies a loss of vision.



A Social History spanning 140 years

Vision Support has been providing help and assistance for people affected by vision impairments since 1876. Our goal has always been to aid people in maintaining their independence and autonomy; whilst raising awareness of the challenges faced by those with sight loss.

We were founded under the name: The Chester Association For The Home Teaching Of The Blind. The original focus was to send Home Teachers out to educate people with visual impairments in applicable skills.

By 1907, a new scheme of work for the Society was adopted emphasising the teaching of practical skills and assisting vision impaired people in 'any manual work they may be able to do'. Ensuring as many people as possible were earning a wage. At a time when few social services were active

Robert Oliver Clough, for example, was registered as a blind worker with the society in 1932. He is recorded as making brushes for 47 hours a week and would be paid £1 and 8 shillings for doing so. This equates to somewhere in the region of £104 in today's market, not accounting for varying item prices.

In 2015, the Chester Vision Centre opened inside the Bluecoat Hospital. A drop-in facility in Chester city centre that offers peer-to-peer support, advice and training for people with vision impairment, plus a range of volunteering opportunities open to all. The Centre is run by and for blind and partially sighted people who will influence its current and future work through a project management group.



In 2001 we merged with Vision Enhancement Services. The new Charity took the working name of Vision Support. A trading company was also established this year under the name of Vision Support trading, which covenanted all profits to the work of the Charity. The merger allowed us to support a larger area and more service users.

To reach this larger area we introduced two innovative Mobile Resource Centres. The centres travel around North Wales and Cheshire providing information on anything from services we provide to technology that is available.



Blinde Brstenmacher: Blind brush maker, Imperial Royal Institute for the Education of the Blind, Vienna . Circa 1878-1898

S. Wilcox also had her salary met by the society in 1932. She worked as a music teacher in Ashton on Mersey and was trained at Hernshaw's Blind Asylum. She was paid 12 shillings and 9 pence for a 7 hour week. Equating to around £50 in today's money. This means she earned almost half of what Robert earned, whilst working 40 hours less.



As well as paying salaries for employed blind workers, the society made efforts to provide leisure activities, such as a library of embossed texts available to members. Here is a record of a Library Report, dated 1935-36

‘630 volumes of embossed Literature including both Braille and Moon books were issued to our Readers, in addition to those obtained by the more advanced Readers direct from the National Library. We have also borrowed books, but as there is an ever-increasing use of the Library. New books are urgently required. The old and simple reader wants simple stories, but it is absolutely necessary that we should have some up-to-date books.’

It has always been the goal of the society to improve quality of life. As well as embossed literature, the society provided useful equipment to its service users. This can be seen in a snippet of the minutes from a 1958 meeting:

‘Applications from 3 blind persons for membership of the Talking Book Library, had been received, but in each case, the purchase of a machine could not be afforded owing to family circumstances.

Then in the 1970’s Local Authority Social Services Departments began to directly administer a greater part of the support offered to visually impaired people (took their time about it didn’t they?).

The Society continued to concentrate on providing additional services such as sheltered employment, provision of equipment, talking books and holidays.

in 1986, Viscount Lord Leverhulme the third, opened a Vision Resource Centre at 67 Liverpool Road. The centre ran for nearly 20 years before the society moved to its current residence at 1&2 The Rope-works. 67 Liverpool road now operates as part of the University of Chester’s Law school.



In 1955 the society entered new premises at 67 Liverpool Road, Chester. The purchase is recorded in the minute books:

‘Mr. Formstone reported that the offer of £4,400 for this property had been accepted by the owner, and the deposit of £440, had been paid to Mr. Rogers’

This property served as a base of operations for the Home Teachers employed by the society, who would make visits to the service users. At the time the number of registered users looked like this:

By the 1960’s, the Home Teachers had their salaries

	Blind	Partially Sighted
Chester	898	209
Cheshire	95	14
Flintshire	306	88
Total	1299	311

met by local authorities, showing the necessity of this service to the public.

It was resolved that the Society should purchase the machines when available to lend to the people concerned.’ - 19th June, 1958

These ‘talking book machines’ were modified record players with guides situated on them to allow the user to find the controls and needle. The talking book library consisted of audio books recorded onto vinyl. Audio books are now widely available online and can be downloaded to a computer, phone or tablet device.



First 33 1/3 rpm Talking Book machine. Picture taken from AFB website.

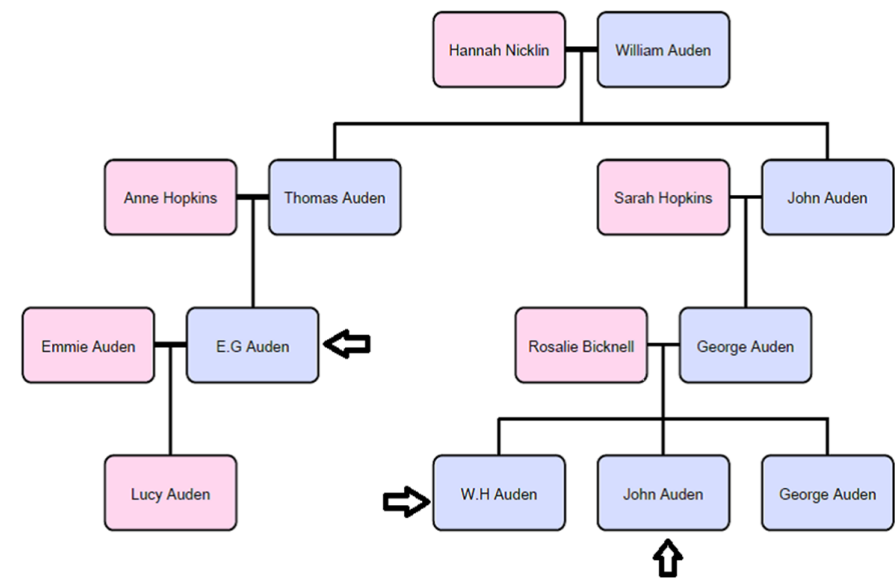
Vision Support has always been overseen by a board of trustees whose job it is to ensure the society meets the needs of its service users, whilst also maintaining financial viability. From 1932 until 1954 this post was filled by the Reverend Eustace George Auden.

Auden was born in 1872 in Shropshire. He was from a highly religious family, with four of his close relatives also being reverends. Other relatives include the writer W.H. Auden, one of the most critically acclaimed writers of the 20th century and his brother the geologist and explorer John Auden.

The reverend was a prominent man in the Cheshire area and gave vigils throughout the First World War: ‘ A lantern lecture had taken place at Byley School-room on Tuesday entitled “Fire and Sword in Belgium” given by the Reverend E. G. Auden to a large audience.’ - Friday 6th November 1914

He served for almost thirty years with the Charity and his work was appreciated and not forgotten. A note of his death is kept in the minutes of a meeting from 1958.

Auden Family Tree



‘The Chairman informed the meeting with great regret of the death of The Rev. E. G. Auden on the 9th instant. Mr Auden had been connected with the Society since 1928 and had been Chairman since 1932 until 1954, when he retired and was made Vice-President. The Meeting stood in silence and it was resolved that a letter should be written to Mrs. Auden, expressing the sympathy of the Committee and their appreciation of all his work for the Society.’ - 1958