



# SRSB

Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind

**At the heart of the community for 160 years**





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## **Contents**

**Foreword**

**Introduction**

**Chapter 1: Early years**

**Chapter 2: 1900 - 1949**

**Chapter 3: 1950 - 1999**

**Chapter 4: 2000 onwards**

**Chapter 5: The workshops**

**Chapter 6: The School for Blind Children**

**Chapter 7: Overend Cottages and Cairn Home**

**Chapter 8: Support in the Community**

**Chapter 9: Governance and Management**

**Chapter 10: Raising funds and profile**

**Chapter 11: The charity and society**

**Sources and Bibliography**

## Foreword from the Earl of Scarborough



*Earl and Countess of Scarborough*

In 2013 I became Patron of the Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind and was delighted to be involved when they opened Rotherham Sight & Sound in 2017.

My family have had a long tradition of public service and as the 13th Earl of Scarborough I am delighted to continue that tradition, after inheriting the title in 2004. SRSB had previously had a connection with my family through my mother, when she carried out the official opening of the Overend Extension to Cairn Home in 2002.

# Introduction

**W**orkshops for the blind in Sheffield were opened on West Street on 17 September, 1860. For those training there, the choice may well have been between the workshops or the workhouse. The city, society, medical treatments and knowledge, attitudes, technology, communications and the powers and interventions of national and local government changed significantly in the succeeding 162 years. This brief history is an attempt to examine how the charity and the communities in which it operates have adapted to deal with these changes. The first four chapters provide a chronological overview of events; particular aspects of the charity are examined in more detail in later pages.

My thanks are due to Neil Anderson of Neil Anderson Media for editing and pulling the book together; to

all contributors and a small group at SRSB who have helped with regular discussions as the work has progressed: Joanne Ardern, Steve Loane, David Ashforth and especially, Jane Peach; and finally, to my wife Liz for her support and patience.

Where I have quoted from other sources I have identified them in the text except where, as in most of the cases, the quotation is direct from one of the charity's own annual reports where it is unattributed.

In the text a couple of sets of initials are used:

**SRSB** for Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind

**RSS** for Rotherham Sight and Sound.

**Richard Frost**

Chairman, Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind.

February 2023

# Chapter 1: Early years

In the late 18th century Thomas Harrison, a Sheffield saw-maker based in Hollis Croft, went to London with one of his workmen Elick Rutter. Elick, who was dressed as a carpenter apparently fresh from his workbench, toured the London shops asking for “Harrison’s saws”. No one knew of this manufacturer, although they had plenty of saws made by other eminent firms which they were happy to recommend. Elick wasn’t interested, declaring that “there were no saws like Harrison’s” and “they were the only ones he would use”. This made its due impression and when, a few days afterwards, Mr Harrison happened to call soliciting orders, he found no difficulty in winning them.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Harrison’s business generated the wealth that enabled him to build Weston House in Sheffield, set in a twelve-acre park, on the site of the present Weston Park Museum. He had two daughters, Ann and Elizabeth (Eliza), who never married and continued to live at Weston Hall after their father’s death in 1818. They inherited the family wealth and become generous benefactors.

Ann Harrison died on 14 May 1858, aged 58. The Sheffield Times reported:

“In connection with her excellent and like-minded sister, who happily survives, Miss Harrison was the founder and patroness of the churches of Wadsley and the Wicker, as well as a liberal contributor to the erection and endowment of those at Stannington and Crookes – to say nothing of contributions to similar objects in places at a distance and to various schools here and elsewhere”.<sup>2</sup>



*Eliza Harrison, 1801-1873* Picture Sheffield

Ann had shown a keen interest in the welfare of blind people and it was in memory of this that Eliza started exploring ways in which she could provide help and support. She took a lively interest in a local blind school where a few ladies met twice a week to read to the pupils, who were also learning to read themselves using raised letters. On Whit Monday in 1859 sixteen of the pupils, together with poor children from the workhouse, were invited to Weston Hall for entertainment and singing.

The Rev. W. Odom recorded that for many years Eliza had been a Sunday school teacher, first at Crookes and then St. George’s and “was most zealous in the cause of Sunday observance”. “She was a lover of music and art. Often she would charm friends and visitors with her harp on

which she was an accomplished player. Her gifts were truly munificent. It was said that she bestowed three-fourths of her income on religious and charitable objects and that in order to give the more she was accustomed to live in a very frugal manner.”<sup>3</sup> In her will she left seventy-two legacies, totalling £65,800, although the blind institution she had founded received only £100 of this.

In 1859, together with other local people, she set up a public appeal to raise funds to open a centre where blind people could be trained in a range of skills to enable them to work and earn their own livelihoods. This was an idea that Ann and Eliza had discussed and Ann, before her death, had expressed a particular wish that her sister would endeavour to carry it out. As a result of the money raised, the committee overseeing the appeal was able to rent workshops in West Street and purchase the materials to be used in them. Local blind people were keen to be involved in this venture. On the death

of a local blind man Charles Jackson in 1903, the institution’s annual report noted: “Forty-three years ago, he and two other blind young men, in collaboration with the late Miss Harrison, created the nucleus of the Sheffield Institution for the Blind; visiting several tradesmen of the town, they made known their requirements for tools and materials and, being accompanied by Miss Harrison herself to plead for the new enterprise, they were presented with the entire outfit.”

The “Industrial School for the Blind” was opened on September 17 1860, at 47 West Street. The first four sections created were hamper and basket making, brush making, mat making and the weaving of matting used to cover church and chapel aisles.

The premises were in a yard behind the shop of a stationer and arrangements were made with him to open a room over his shop for the sale of the articles which had been produced.

By June 1861 the school had opened its



*Original Workshops on West Street*

own shop at 19 West Street for the sale of the articles which included “brushes of all kinds, baskets, mats, matting and fancy articles.”<sup>4</sup>. In addition, there was a stall at the new market hall which sold wares on Tuesdays and Saturdays and two blind travellers were engaged in soliciting orders, one an old soldier who had lost his sight in India and lived in nearby Rotherham.

For all this it was a struggle to achieve the necessary sales levels. There were other issues as well. In the Sheffield Independent on 15 February 1862, the “Manufactory for the Blind” announced that “We are informed that several persons are hawking goods professing to have come from the manufactory for the blind. The managers of that institution cautioned the public against purchasing from any persons except Robert Storey and James Binkley who are the only hawkers authorised to carry out goods from that institution.”

Despite the struggles with sales levels, the number employed continued to grow. Towards the end of 1867 the committee received notice to quit the shop, but at the same time were given the opportunity to acquire the workshop premises and an adjoining property which would allow a retail shop to be combined in the same building as the factory. However, to do so would cost around £1,000 and so, in February 1868, a public appeal was launched.

Over 400 people contributed and £974 was raised. Eliza donated £50 but “had been instrumental in contributing or raising £600 through her indefatigable exertions and zeal.”<sup>5</sup>

A special general meeting was held on 23rd December to appoint trustees for the premises on West Street, to set up rules of management and to appoint a committee to run the organisation. 13 trustees were elected including Eliza Harrison and she was also elected to the committee of management. The institution was to be called the “North of England Manufactory for the Blind” and its objects were to be “the instruction and employment of the blind of both sexes in trades and occupations of a useful character and also of the education of the blind of both sexes”.

The committee was to consist of a president, one or more vice presidents, a treasurer, an honorary secretary and seven or more committee members. Lord Wharnccliffe was appointed president and Earl Fitzwilliam the institution’s first patron.

In 1873, the year that Eliza Harrison died, the institution merged with another charity, the Sheffield Home Mission and Sabbath School for the Blind. The Sheffield Sunday School for the Blind had first met at the Temperance Hall in July 1865. Of the seven teachers at the school four were blind themselves. The home mission was run by a Miss Lucy Swallow and two other members of the Swallow family were also amongst the teachers. In addition to visiting blind people in their homes the charity collected donations of money and clothing and other articles needed in particular circumstances. In addition, thanks to some generous donations, it had built up a library of books for the blind.

The second half of the decade saw a move in a new direction. On 24 April 1875, Caroline Davenport died. She was the



sister of Daniel Holy who, in his will, left an estate of over £20,000 in trust to his sister for her lifetime and thereafter to the Sheffield Town Trust, whose trustees were to pay the annual income from the estate to the "Institution for the Blind" on West Street provided that, within five years of his sister's death, a building suitable for a blind institution had been erected or purchased within the parish of Sheffield. By the end of May, after a meeting with the Town Trust, it was agreed that, as desired by Daniel Holy, this should be a school modelled on one already set up in Birmingham.

In view of the five-year limit, meetings were held in Sheffield to secure Daniel Holy's bequest. On 19 December 1876, the Mayor, George Bassett, presided over a meeting at Cutlers' Hall. A two-acre site on Manchester Road had been identified as being suitable and, by the end of the meeting, subscriptions had been received totalling £5,038. A general town's committee was set up to aid the trustees

in raising further subscriptions and the site was purchased in 1877. The local firm of Flockton and Gibbs was appointed architects.

The new school was opened on 24 September 1879, by Samuel Roberts from the Town Trustees, at a total cost of £15,000. The Illustrated London News reported on the event, noting that Mr. Roberts and Mr. J.H. Barber had been "the most zealous and devoted labourers in this cause". To begin with, the stone building was intended to accommodate 25 boys and 25 girls but could eventually handle double that number. It was divided into two wings, the one on the right for boys and on the left for girls.

The manufactory and shop continued to generate little surplus and, in 1881, it was reported that the trustees had agreed to the demolition and rebuilding of the workshop and premises on West Street and that, again, Flockton and Gibbs had been appointed architects for the new buildings. Approval was obtained to alter



*The School on Manchester Road*

the rules of the institution to allow the trustees to acquire the premises next door which would necessitate raising funds by way of a mortgage.

Whilst the new buildings were being constructed temporary workshops were rented in Burgess Street and a retail shop at 109 West Street. In 1882 the title of the organisation was changed from "The North of England Manufactory for the Blind" to "The Sheffield Institution for the Blind". In the 1883 annual report it was noted that "commodious and healthy workshops" had now been completed at a cost of £3,638. The new buildings comprised "ample" work rooms, and a retail shop fronting West Street, with living rooms for the manager above it. There was also a warehouse, a committee room with library attached and a room for the work people to eat and congregate on the ground floor. The premises were heated by Truswell's low pressure steam apparatus.

As a result of the increased levels of work involved a salaried secretary was appointed, W.R. Carter having carried out the secretarial and administrative duties on a voluntary basis for the previous 16 years.

Whilst the Poor Laws had provided for some assistance for poor blind people there was growing pressure for state assistance. In 1884 a Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb was set up and its report was issued in 1889 recommending the compulsory education of blind children up to the age of 16 either in schools or technical institutions. The 1893 Education (Blind and Deaf) Act ensured that the education of blind children was no longer to be left to charitable enterprise, although the Sheffield School

Board applied for the Manchester Road school to be certified by the Education Department and it was consequently authorised to provide education, board and lodging for up to 70 pupils.

Towards the end of the century the institution erected a large advertising board at the Drill Hall on Glossop Road and installed a telephone in the warehouse on West Street. John Brown and Co. donated £500 to help pay off the mortgage on the West Street property and a Mrs Overend of Retford left a legacy of £2,000. It was decided that the best use of this legacy would be to build cottage homes for aged blind persons and land was acquired at Selborne Road, Crosspool for this purpose.

Work began in 1899, although it was delayed by bad weather that winter. As a result of improvements in management and economy, the workshops returned their first profit in many years. The president of the institution, the Earl of Wharncliffe, died in May that year after over 30 years in the role.

#### **Notes.**

1. From "Sheffield in the Eighteenth Century" by Robert Leader. 1901.
2. Quoted in "Memoranda of the late Ann Harrison of Weston." Printed for private circulation. 1859.
3. "Hallamshire Worthies – Characteristics and Work of Notable Sheffield Men and Women" by Rev. W. Odom. 1926.
4. Advert in Sheffield Independent. 22 June 1861.
5. Sheffield Daily Telegraph. 24 December 1868.

## Chapter 2: 1900 - 1949

The first half of the twentieth century was to see the further evolution of the institution, often as a result of the growing impact of government legislation and local authority powers as well as from developing technologies and the effects of two world wars.

Overend Cottages were opened on 29 September 1900, with five of the six tenancies handed out. The tenants were to receive a small weekly allowance and their rates, local taxes, gas and water charges were all paid for by the institution.

The next year the trustees were served notice that a portion of their West Street property would be required by Sheffield Corporation as that street was to be widened for the tramway and the building line would need to be moved back nineteen feet. This would necessitate demolishing the existing frontage and three years later the corporation agreed to contribute £4,670 towards a new property, which was opened on 20 April 1906 by the institution's president, Sir Samuel Roberts, MP for Ecclesall and son of the Samuel Roberts who had opened the school on Manchester Road twenty-seven years earlier.

The home mission carried out the benevolent, religious and social work of the institution. On 1 January 1902, the Lord Mayor invited all the known adult blind people of the city together with guides and many friends of the institution to a dinner and concert at the town hall with nearly 500 attending.

As well as home visits, evening classes

were held covering physical education, literature, Braille reading, sewing and cookery. The Benevolent Sick Fund Committee paid weekly allowances to several ill blind people and donations were received at Christmas to provide for food boxes and gifts. An adult Sunday school met each week. In 1907, 120 members from there and the workshops took the train to Cleethorpes for the day. Other events, visits and concerts were held over the course of the year.

**As well as home visits, evening classes were held covering physical education, literature, Braille reading, sewing and cookery**

The school normally had its full complement of 70 pupils. In 1912 only 16 were from Sheffield and 54 from elsewhere.

In the years leading into the First World War, and indeed in the early years of the war, the workshops and retail shop were generating substantial returns. During the war the playing fields at the school were used to grow potatoes and other vegetables and several appeals were made to raise funds to provide aid at a time when the costs of food, clothing and fuel had greatly increased.

Up until the end of the First World War many blind people in the country were dependent on charities for employment, usually in workshops. The National League of the Blind had been set up in 1894 to campaign for the rights of the visually impaired. Membership of the League was

restricted to blind people and partially sighted people and one of its principal tenets was a hostility towards charity and a belief that standing in society should not depend on the benevolence of others. In 1918, it estimated that 20,000 out of 30,000 blind people in the country were living in poverty.

After a number of protestations, including a march in Sheffield in July 1919, it organised the 1920 Blind March, a 20-day protest march on London from across the country, to meet the Prime Minister and other members of Parliament. They passed through Sheffield on 7 April, the Sheffield Independent reporting “an

**By 1923 arrangements had been made with other authorities and the institution now extended its services to Rotherham and other neighbouring areas**

enthusiastic welcome”; “for more than a mile the route was lined with dense throngs of people, whose encouraging remarks brought brave smiles to the faces of the tired marchers... they make good progress, moving along arm-in-arm, the files keeping in line by means of light poles, or walking-sticks, which are held by the flank men”. Later that year the Government published the Blind Persons Act 1920, reducing the pension age of blind men from 70 to 50 and requiring local authorities to “promote the welfare of blind persons”.

At first this seemed an opportunity for the institution, working with the city authorities, to provide better services. Arrangements were made to purchase land from Sheffield Corporation to extend

the workshops on West Street. There were now four home teachers, two sighted and two blind, who taught Braille and “home industries” when visiting at home. In 1919 King George V had visited Sheffield and, having shown interest in the work of the institution, granted it permission to use the prefix “Royal” in 1921.

By 1923 arrangements had been made with other authorities and the institution now extended its services to Rotherham and other neighbouring areas and, in 1924, the school capacity was increased from 70 to 80.

However, scandal was to embrace the charity and in the same year it was reported to a “tempestuous meeting” chaired by the Lord Mayor, that the institute’s former salaried secretary, a Mr Williamson, had been “robbing the blind” and stolen around £1,500 over the previous 20 years. Williamson had been appointed in March 1897 and had been a long serving and trusted employee. The auditor was asked to carry out an investigation and Williamson confessed to misappropriation. The auditor, Charles Collier, reported to the committee of management on August 22, 1923, “he has since called upon me and informed me that he has falsified the general account systematically by making false entries in the books, supported by false vouchers. He also stated that he made entries for travelling expenses when no such expenses had been incurred”. A second accountant was also called to investigate and report. There were calls for the entire management committee to resign which were resisted but a series of much tighter internal controls and procedures were put

in place. Williamson was sentenced to one year's imprisonment.

In 1925 additional premises were rented at 140 to 144, West Street and overhauled to create separate workshops and a shop for the women's departments. The institution was now working more closely with the city, whose grant increased from £124 in 1924 to £1,500 a year later. In 1926, Sheffield became the first city in the country to elect a Labour council. Its leader, Ernest Rowlinson wrote: "In Sheffield we are hoping to make our local contribution to bring about a real Socialist Commonwealth" and they greatly expanded the role of the municipality. The city council now demanded overall control of the institution if it was to continue to delegate to it the duty for carrying out the provisions of the Blind Persons Act 1920.

A special meeting was held at the Cutlers' Hall on 11 May 1927. The trustees rejected the proposals from the council which, as a result, on 2 September, took over the statutory duties for blind people, including the West Street workshops. The council paid for the machinery at valuation but bought none of the stock which had to be auctioned off at considerably reduced prices. The council even argued, unsuccessfully, that the endowment funds of the charity should be handed over, on the basis that the council was performing all or a portion of the services for which such funds had been specifically subscribed.

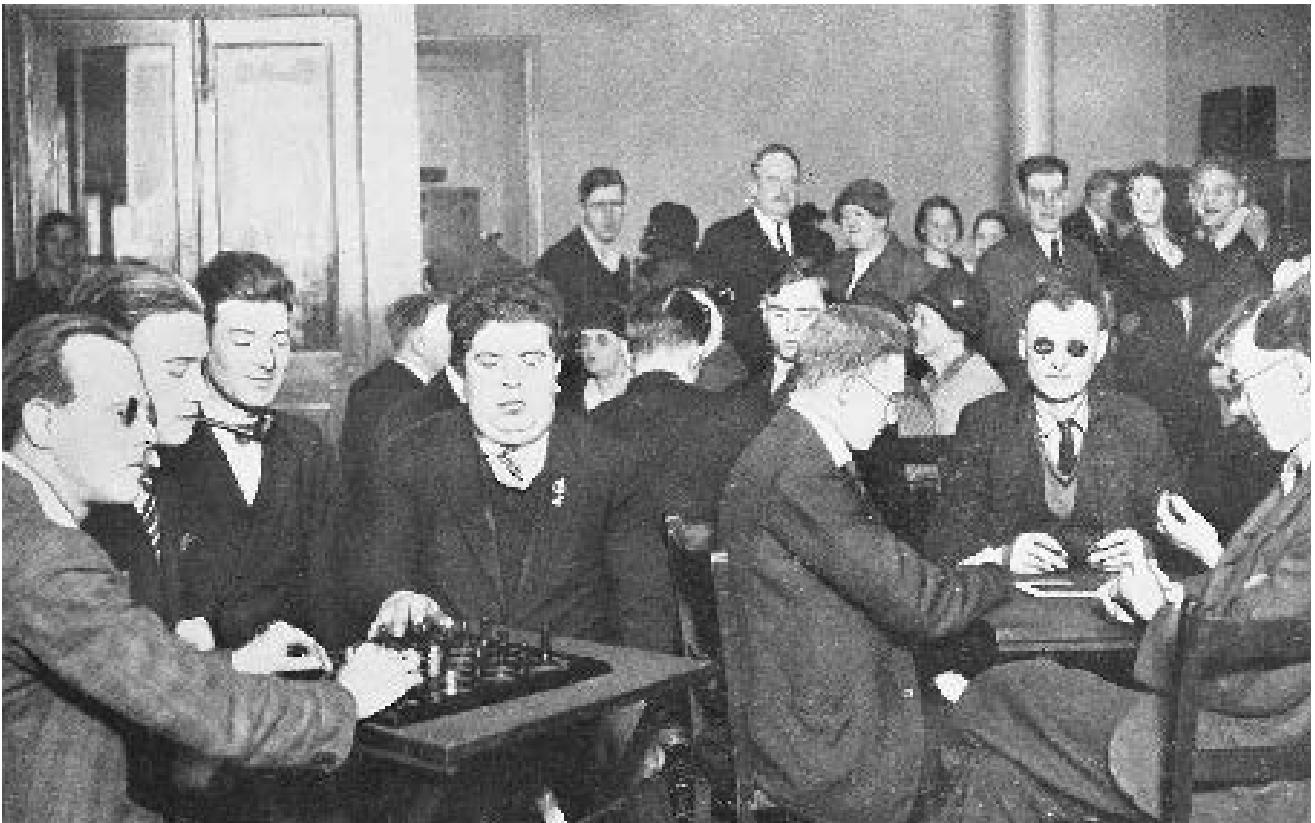
The institute retained ownership of the West Street premises and maintained an assembly room and centre for social work on the first floor. It now concentrated its efforts on the school, Overend Cottages,

home mission work and social, religious and giving activities. Pensions were paid out to around 50 members who did not receive civic aid. Grants were made in cases of sickness or towards the costs of spectacles, artificial teeth, holidays, clothing and funeral expenses.

The home visitors ensured the sick were visited, either at home or in hospital and given food and gifts.

Once the council had opened new and larger workshops in Sharrow in 1930, the West Street premises were rented out. In February 1931 a more commodious assembly room and office and kitchen were opened at 2, Holly Lane, off West Street. By 1934 the Sunday services were attracting 200 attendees. Meetings were held on Wednesdays, in the afternoon for women and the evening for men; there were Thursday evening social gatherings. Afternoon meetings were set up for young and unemployed men to help develop handicraft skills. Concerts were staged monthly, there were large Christmas events and annual visits to the seaside. In 1931 nine crystal sets had been received from the British "wireless for the blind" fund and the institute bore the costs of installation and maintenance. More sets were received over the succeeding years and in 1934 steps were taken to help deafblind people with some being treated by specialists and hearing aids purchased where appropriate.

In 1928 Mr and Mrs Maddocks retired as superintendent and matron of the school after 30 years, to be replaced by Mr and Mrs Bloomfield. The curriculum was similar to that of an ordinary school but, in addition, handicrafts were taught to help



*Social Gathering at Holly Lane*

prepare the pupils for future employment. Typewriting and Braille shorthand were taught to those with an aptitude for it and mat looms, knitting machines and brush and basket making machines were installed. A house system was introduced in 1930 with four houses in competition with each other and the school had its own scout and guide troops. A school magazine "Nil Desperandum" (meaning 'No Despair') was produced and printed, helped by the acquisition of a Gestetner duplicator. In 1934 the school sports team competed against teams from the Manchester and Leeds institutions for the blind and it was hoped to make this an annual event with more teams from the north of the country.

On October 16 1935, extensions to the school were opened with a domestic science room, handicraft rooms and a gymnasium.

On the same day in 1935 Cairn Home was opened on land adjoining Overend Cottages. This had accommodation for 12 elderly men, each of whom had their own cubicle in a large dormitory.

It had a separate dining room and two sitting rooms. As early as 1918 discussions had taken place about a residential home for the blind people of the city not cared for elsewhere, but it was another 17 years before such a home was opened. It cost over £5,000 funded by a number of gifts, principally £1,000 from a Mrs Murfitt in memory of her parents, Mr and Mrs John Hardcastle of Cairn Holme, Woodhouse, after which the home was named.

The Holly Street premises soon became too small for the activities being carried out and in 1938 work had begun on a new site that had been acquired on Mappin Street.

The building was to include a large hall

and kitchen, a handicraft room, office, boardroom and caretaker's apartment and was opened by the Duchess of Norfolk on July 21 1939. However, with the outbreak of war the Sunday services, concerts and mid-week meetings were cancelled although home visits continued. Some activities and the Sunday services resumed in April 1940, but following a Christmas party on December 12, the Sheffield Blitz began. Luckily all the party goers were home before the bombs fell, but the West Street premises were damaged and meetings were again suspended. With Mappin Street not being fully utilised most of it was let out to the department store Cockaynes for use as a restaurant – their city centre premises had been destroyed in the bombing.

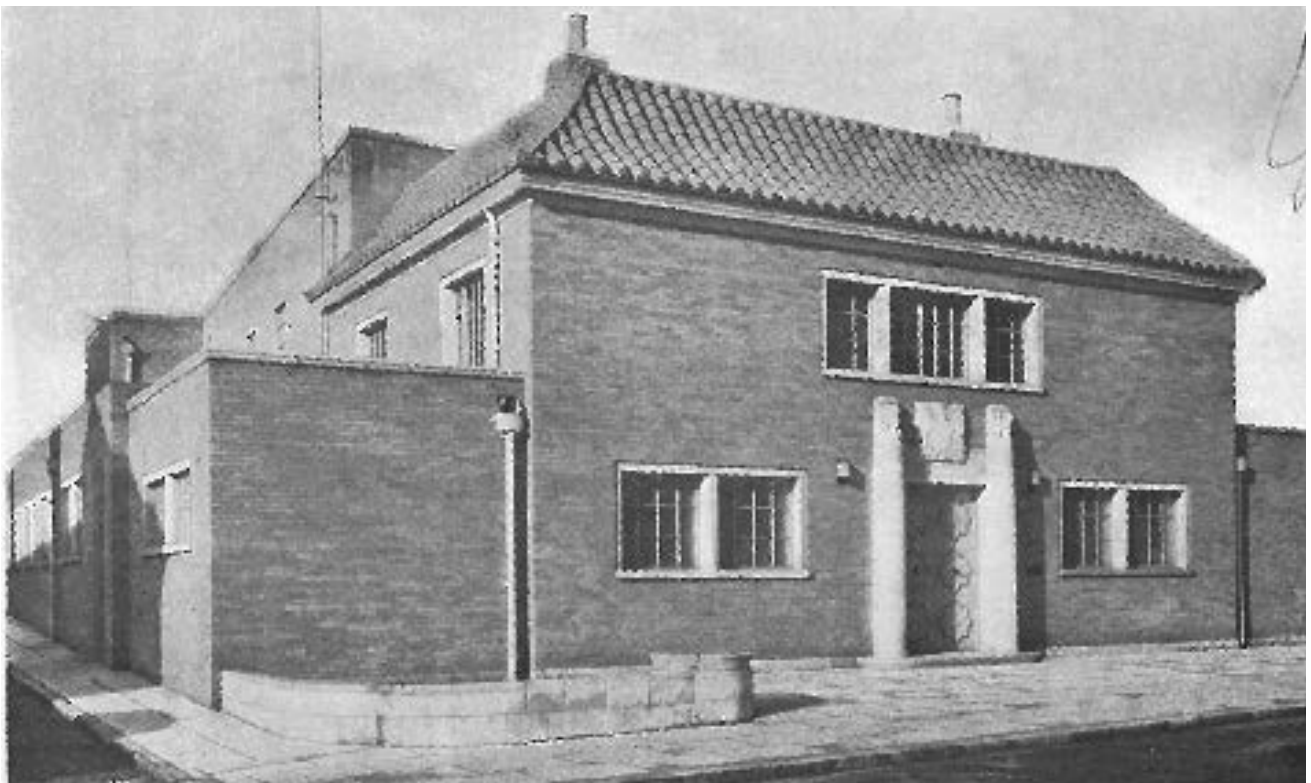
The Sunday services resumed later in the war and became very popular as so many other social activities were restricted. Air raid shelters were set up in the school

basement and once again the children were engaged in gardening which was part of the curriculum and helped them feel they were contributing to the war effort. Home visits continued but rationing meant that it was no longer possible to hand out fruit and eggs although cash gifts were still made.

**On October 16 1935, extensions to the school were opened with a domestic science room, handicraft rooms and a gymnasium**

Wartime shortages of staff and rationing created significant problems for the school, which at one point nearly closed, and for Cairn Home which could not support its full complement of residents.

The 1944 Education Act placed greater obligations and powers on local authorities regarding the education of disabled children. Sheffield Education Authority planned to build a new school for blind



*Mappin Street Premises*

children, but in the meantime took control of the Manchester Road premises which were leased to them at a nominal rent of £10 a year for seven years.

In December 1945 Cockaynes hosted the first Christmas party for blind people since the outbreak of war. In December 1946 they vacated the premises. A new steward

**In December 1945 Cockaynes hosted the first Christmas party for blind people since the outbreak of war**

and stewardess were appointed, the building redecorated and social activities slowly resumed, the institute working with the city council to determine how Mappin Street and the council's Sharrow Lane workshops could be best utilised without duplicating activities at both sites.

By 1949 the kitchens at Mappin Street had been upgraded and modern speakers and deaf appliances added to the stage, which was now recognised as one of the best equipped in Sheffield for amateur theatricals, concerts and banquets; when concerts or theatricals were staged, a number of tickets were allocated to blind people.

The 1948 National Assistance Act placed a duty on local authorities to provide residential accommodation for aged and infirm blind persons and enabled them to make payments where the accommodation was provided by a voluntary society. Although these payments did not cover all the costs of running Cairn, they were a contribution, reducing the overall costs to residents.



*Many buildings were completely destroyed in the Sheffield Blitz*



## Chapter 3: 1950 - 1999

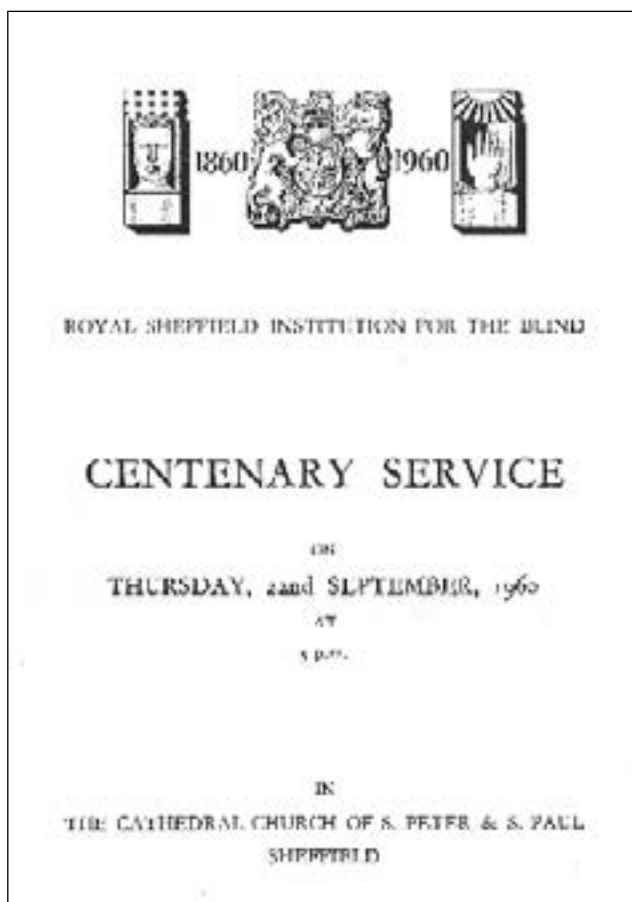
The trustees began 1950 with a bold statement of intent: "It is the policy of the board that the blind in Sheffield should be as well, or, if possible, better looked after than in any other town and they are confident that in this they will be supported". As amounts spent on supporting blind people had greatly increased, the organisation was running at a deficit and there was a drive to increase income culminating in 1954 with the appointment of Edward Kaulfuss as public relations officer. He was himself blind and set to work to such effect that in 1956 the accounts showed a surplus for the first time in ten years. He arranged collections

at Bramall Lane and Hillsborough, raised money through selling footballs and cricket bats signed by local sportsmen in working mens' clubs and, in 1956, the charity was one of seven to benefit from Sheffield University Rag Day. As a result of his work there was growing local interest in and support for the organisation.

Funds had also been boosted by the sale of the Manchester Road School property to the council for £36,000. Through a Joint Blind Welfare Committee there was close working with the council in dealing with the application of the Blind Persons Act and the National Assistance Act. Apart from a brief gap in the early 1950s the council also shared the costs of the annual seaside outing. In 1958 an entire boarding house in Bridlington was booked for four weeks during the summer and 135 blind people and their guides were able to have a week's holiday at low cost to themselves, mainly funded by the institute.

In 1957 work began on extending Cairn Home to accommodate women. It was planned to be one of the most up to date homes in the country with the creation of eight single and four double rooms, accommodation for resident assistants and two lounges. The extension was completed on March 31 1959, and was full by May with 14 female and 12 male residents. As a result of two bequests it was possible to install wirelasses in the bedrooms and lounges. Total costs were over £26,000.

As well as annual Christmas gifts, the institute also distributed coal to aged and infirm clients over the winter months.



*Centenary Cathedral Service*



ROYAL SHEFFIELD INSTITUTION FOR THE BLIND

27, MAPPIN STREET,  
SHEFFIELD,  
S1 2AP

TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN:

On the occasion of their Centenary Year Annual General Meeting, the Governors of the Royal Sheffield Institution for the Blind humbly send to your Majesty most loyal and warm-hearted greetings from themselves and the blind people of Sheffield. The Governors take pride in the Royal Sheffield Institution's century of undoubted achievement, and confidently look forward to the future development of the Institution's activities.

ROBERT HARGREAVES

Chairman of the Board of Management,  
Royal Sheffield Institution for the Blind.

11th JULY, 1960.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

ROBERT HARGREAVES, Esq.

Chairman of the Board of Management,  
Royal Sheffield Institution for the Blind.

The Queen sincerely thanks you and the Governors of the Royal Sheffield Institution for the Blind for the kind message of loyal greetings which you have sent to Her Majesty on behalf of the blind people of Sheffield. The Queen warmly congratulates the Institution on the completion of one hundred years' service to blind people and sends her best wishes for the continuance of its good work.

PRIVATE SECRETARY

11th JULY, 1960.

*The Queen's Telegram*

Where necessary, the home visitors handed out bedding, clothing, furniture and grants towards holidays and decorating costs. To mark the Queen's Coronation in 1953, gift boxes of cigarettes, sweets and biscuits had been presented to all local blind people.

Seven years later, on the occasion of the institute's centenary, inscribed wallets or purses were distributed to 1,027 blind people, together with a £1 note. A brochure was commissioned and 3,000 copies distributed. It included a copy of a telegram from the Queen which had originally been sent to be read at the 1960 annual general meeting. A service was held in Sheffield Cathedral on 22 September 1960, attended by over 500

people mostly blind who were provided with Braille service sheets. The audience included the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Sheffield who invited the committee and friends to tea afterwards at the town hall. The choir was made up of children from the Sheffield School for the Blind.

By now Mappin Street was invaluable as a social centre. Most days there were meetings of men's, women's or mixed clubs at which members played cards, dominoes, skittles, listened to readings and took part in discussions or impromptu concerts. There were monthly whist drives and dances and annual meetings with local welfare centres.

One of the most popular gatherings was

on Saturdays when sports commentaries were relayed to both Mappin Street and Cairn Home by the Sheffield Hospitals Sports Commentaries Society. The nondenominational Sunday service still attracted large congregations each week and were led by ministers and musicians who came from all parts of the city.

In 1962 the open fires at Cairn Home were replaced with radiators and a year later Crosspool Cottage was purchased, adjoining the home and the only land available for any future extension. This was to be demolished in 1992 and the site used to extend the gardens. In 1968 the Social Care Department of Sheffield

**In 1978 a new minibus was purchased for the school and, for the first time, one was also acquired to bring people into Mappin Street**

Corporation took over the management of Cairn Home on a 21-year lease with a nominal rent, the institution having made a substantial contribution to the cost of modernising the interior to the standards required by the Ministry of Health.

Expenditure continued through the 1970s. The West Street property was still retained as an investment and required significant maintenance in 1972. The next year an electronic organ and a new amplification system and stereo equipment were installed at Mappin Street. In 1978 Mappin Street was rewired and Overend Cottages modernised, with the installation of central heating, renovation of the bathrooms and new doors and windows. In the same year a new minibus was purchased for the school and, for the first time, one was also acquired to bring

people into Mappin Street, which was now being used by around 200 people a week. Also, at Mappin Street, a purpose-built kitchen was available to practice domestic skills under supervision and a flat with a miniature laundry was provided for newly blind people to enable them "to relearn the arts of daily life". A lease was taken on the ground floor of 11 Mappin Street and all office staff were relocated, making rooms available for a resources room and a craft centre.

Following a review of operations in 1978 the organisation was divided into two divisions, welfare and fundraising. A new limited company was set up, the Sheffield Blind Shop selling furniture and jumble with a shop and warehouse in Cecil Square. Fundraising had always been a major part of operations; in 1972 a tote had been introduced and by 1974 was raising nearly £10,000 a year.

Outside organisations also played an important part in fundraising. In 1979 the Rotary Club of Hallam raised £5,000 to fund the new resource room with two Visualtek machines. These were closed circuit television systems that enabled words, letters or objects to be magnified up to 64 times, with the picture being shown on a TV screen. It helped with reading correspondence and bills, typing and handicraft demonstrations and enabled parents to "see" their children, very often for the first time ever. A Thermoform machine meant that Braille could be duplicated, so that information such as details of local radio programmes could be distributed to Braille readers across the city. Another acquisition was a talking calculator, albeit in a mid-American accent.

The 1970s also saw a development in the annual holiday arrangements. In February 1973, 20 blind people and nine sighted guides flew to Benidorm for a week's holiday - the first time that a group of blind people had taken an organised holiday in Spain. They received a tremendous reception from the Mayor of Benidorm, who insisted that the party stay for an extra week as a guest of the city. In 1979, blind people from other parts of the country were also invited and a party of 95 blind and sighted guides flew out to Benidorm with attendees from Glasgow, Liverpool, Preston, Bolton, Manchester, Doncaster and Birmingham, as well as Sheffield.

By the 1980s the blind shop was firmly established and contributing profits. Swimming lessons were introduced and a first newsletter circulated which helped attract younger members looking for activities organised especially for them. A second minibus was purchased to bring more people in for activities and by the middle of the decade over 5,000 lunches were being served each year in the day centre. A gift of £20,000 funded the setting

up of a computer centre, where high-quality grade 2 Braille could be created from normal text and produced in large quantities if necessary. It was felt that the organisation was beginning to shed its old "institution/workhouse" image. However, it was still a fairly small organisation, with the employees consisting of the administrator and his assistant, the day centre supervisor and her assistant, two home visitors and an accountant.

From 1 April 1988, services were extended to all of Sheffield's visually impaired, both registered blind and partially sighted people, with the result that membership increased by 50 percent to over 2,000. The same year saw the purchase of the Cecil Square premises used by the Sheffield Blind Shop and the end of the council's lease of Cairn Home, which was handed back to the institution.

It was agreed that there was still a need for a specialist home for visually impaired people and whilst it was temporarily unoccupied the decision was taken to completely refurbish the home. When it was reopened by the Duchess of



*Group of people at the hotel with the Mayor of Benidorm*



*Sheffield in the 1970s*

Gloucester, it was described as “possibly the finest purpose designed residential home for the visually impaired in the country”. Each of the 25 residents now had their own ensuite toilet and shower.

In the 1990s there were an increasing number of blind and partially sighted people in Sheffield, especially amongst the elderly. 76 percent of those with visual impairment were aged 65 and over. The institution continued to work closely with the Family & Community Services Department at Sheffield Council and, as a result of increasing demand, a third home visitor was taken on and there were more improvements to the facilities at Mappin Street. In 1992, the Disability Living Allowance was introduced to help fund the extra costs of those living with a disability and the staff at Mappin Street helped complete hundreds of application forms. For the next few years, the work of the home visitors was concentrated

on the newly registered as the number of registered blind or partially sighted people increased, with both the average age of the population and the awareness of benefits continuing to grow. The charity shop moved to West Street in 1993, selling donated items but it only lasted for six more years because the premises built in 1906, were sold in 1999.

By the end of the century, like many charities around that time, the organisation had been incorporated as a limited company. On 1 July 1996, all the assets of the Royal Sheffield Institution for the Blind were transferred into the company at market value. The name was also changed to the Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind.

*Original  
SRSB logo*



## Chapter 4: 2000 onwards

**W**ith the shop now closed, monthly jumble and used book sales were held at Mappin Street. By bringing people in to the building these helped raise funds and increased awareness of the society, as did attendance at summer fairs and galas across the city selling goods made in the craft centre.

Steve Hambleton was appointed general manager on 1 August 2000 and began to implement many changes that have helped shape the society today. Home visitors were renamed community advice officers and a new position of community liaison officer was created.

A particular focus was on volunteers, some of whom were themselves visually impaired and all of whom received training and support. In 2002 there were over 70 volunteers; by 2010 this had doubled to 140, working 20,000 hours equivalent to

twelve full time members of staff.

Four new rooms were created at Cairn Home in 2001 by extending into the upper floors of the Overend Cottages. At the same time the dining room was refurbished, a hairdressers set up on the first floor and UPVC windows installed at the front of the buildings. Many other changes were made to meet the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000. In 2002, the National Care Standards Commission was set up to oversee care homes and agencies across the country.

Around 200 people a week were using the activity centre at Mappin Street, but a need was identified for a new centre as the existing building was dated, expensive to run and too cramped for the services provided. Negotiations began with a property developer after the council had given planning permission for a new



*Mappin Street centre following the rebuild in 2009*

centre, along with student accommodation above. The society retained the freehold but granted a rent-free long lease for the accommodation in return for a new, fitted out building to use as a centre.

In May 2007 Mappin Street was vacated and temporary accommodation leased at Darnall which worked well, except that its location deterred some volunteers and clients making the longer journey to the building. A year later than planned, the society moved into their new premises by the end of June 2009. A fundraising and marketing manager had been appointed in 2005 in anticipation of the new building and a total of £89,000 was raised to help equip the centre. A services development committee comprising both trustees and staff was set up to review and make recommendations for new services or on how to improve existing ones.

The new centre was officially opened by Prince Edward on 18 February 2010 and numerous events took place during that year to mark the society's 150th anniversary, culminating with a Masquerade Ball at Baldwins on 17 September, the date on which the first workshops had been opened in 1860. Over the 150 years the society had evolved from a philanthropic organisation to one that combined professional service delivery with the ethos of voluntary service.

Over the next decade changes in society were reflected in changes in the organisation. The marketing strategy had been reviewed in 2011, new marketing consultants appointed, a new website set up to help market services and fundraising events and a presence established on Facebook and Twitter. Numbers at the



*Prince Edward, (now Prince Edward, Duke of Edinburgh, KG, GCVO, CD, ADC) at the official opening, 18 February 2010*

activity centre declined slowly over the course of the decade and, with low levels of attendance, the regular monthly social evenings ceased in 2015. There was a higher turnover of residents at Cairn Home as people were growing older before entering residential care and this, combined with local authority restrictions on funding, adversely impacted occupancy levels and fee income.



*Ship Hill premises*

In April 2017 the Society entered a two-year contract with Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council with a new Centre opening at Ship Hill on 1 August to provide social and leisure activities, advice, information, equipment provision, technology training with groups and

**A team of volunteers telephoned over 300 people each week to check on their well-being and offered support where required**

activities. Clients included those with visual and hearing impairments and some with dual sensory loss. After consultation with users the service was called Rotherham Sight & Sound.

In 2019 following negotiations with the borough council for continued funding, an option was exercised to purchase the Rotherham property.

From March 2020 services were severely hit with the impact of COVID-19. Except for those at Cairn Home, many staff were furloughed and in September and October a number were made redundant. The centres at Mappin Street and Ship Hill were closed and the staff still working did so from home. Clients were supported as much as possible with advice provided over the phone and online and, up until July 2020, the society operated a shopping and medication delivery service.

A team of volunteers telephoned over

## **Covid – a truly testing time for clients and staff**

**W**hen the Prime Minister made his announcement on the 23rd March 2020 that we were going into lockdown none of us could imagine how our lives were going to change.

As an organisation the impact was huge. Initially everything stopped, difficult decisions had to be made as to which staff would continue to work and who would be furloughed and what services and support could be offered whilst still adhering to the rules and restrictions. For staff it was a frustrating time, we all knew there were clients who were out there struggling, isolated and scared and yet we were limited in how much we could do.

We immediately looked at how we could continue to support our most vulnerable clients. A small team of staff set up a service delivering shopping,

medication and equipment. Our fantastic volunteers began phoning round all our regular attendees ensuring they had someone to check in on them and also have some much-needed friendly chat.

By August 2020 we realised that life wasn't going to return to 'normal' any time soon. We reluctantly commenced redundancy consultations with 22 staff across both the Rotherham and Sheffield sites and by October the process was concluded with 17 staff sadly leaving us but the remainder taking up other roles within the organisation. It was a very difficult and challenging time for the charity.

Like most people we never imagined that this strange new way of life would continue for the next two years. Throughout the period we had to be flexible, we learnt to adapt to



300 people each week to check on their well-being and offered support where required. When the centres reopened social distancing and infection controls were operated and hybrid working methods developed.

More lockdowns followed but from March 2021, with all frontline staff vaccinated and regular testing carried out, staff returned to the office and visits resumed, although activities in the centres were restricted subject to the changing guidelines for another 12 months.

At Cairn Home, the pandemic had a significant impact on residents, relatives and staff but resident safety was the paramount concern.

Staff worked hard to maintain spirits and used technology to help residents keep in contact with families and friends. Once garden visits were allowed, a covered outside area was erected and adapted to make it Covid safe as visitors returned.

The society had its 160th anniversary in September 2020, but because of the pandemic was unable to undertake the public celebrations planned. A dinner for that September had to be cancelled but took place on 17 September 2021 in Weston Park Museum, built on the site of the Harrison family's Weston House. Several other fundraising and commemorative events took place over 2022.

the constantly changing rules and restrictions. We developed a hybrid way of working which allowed us to continue to offer a service throughout all three lockdowns. We found new ways to deliver our activities, telephone conferencing calls were set up, enabling groups of clients to have the social interactions that Covid had robbed them of. Video conferencing became a lifeline, we had online quizzes, catch-ups, even wine tastings!

At Cairn Home the staff worked tirelessly to keep the residents safe, they had to deal with PPE, constant testing and long and difficult shifts. It was a challenging time, trying to keep residents spirits up when they were isolating and missing contact with family and friends. Despite being exhausted, staff went above and beyond and the home escaped any major outbreaks.

The impact of the COVID pandemic remains, none of us know what the future holds. Outbreaks, although much less severe still cause disruption to our services. The last two and a half years have had a huge impact on our clients, many are still trying to rebuild their confidence. With all this in mind we had to look at how we could develop a new way of working, that's safer, more structured, yet still enables us to be flexible and responsive to this ever-changing world we now live in.

We are now building on the strong foundations we have had for over 160 years, developing services that are all about enabling people, helping them achieve goals, gain new skills and build confidence whilst still creating connections and friendships.

**Joanne Ardern, CEO**

## Sarah's story

Sarah Bennett began as a client, became a volunteer and supporter and then in 2022 took on the new role of LIFE Ahead Project Co-ordinator as a member of staff:

Not only was Sarah a dedicated volunteer, but she was also a client who had experienced a transformation from absolute despair and denial about the limitations of her sight loss, until she became a woman who happily welcomed the challenges that each day brings. She acknowledged that becoming involved with the charity was a catalyst in this transformation.

Since the resulting growth in her confidence, she took part in several daring fundraising activities to give something back, such as a skydive, firewalk, blind driving and a wing walk! Her talents were not limited to fundraising however; she then wanted to raise awareness of sight loss, and help others with a visual impairment to regain their confidence too. She volunteered with SRSB/RSS's Visual Impairment Awareness (VIA) Training and 'Looking Ahead' courses, for people who are newly registered or experiencing new challenges with their sight loss.

Public speaking is something that, at one time, she never thought she could do! But, she said, "I've talked to big groups of children who asked lovely questions such as how do I dream, talked to people in the workplace, discussed with psychology students the emotional side of sight loss; the isolation and the feeling that there is no point to life. It's hard to believe I was in that dark place myself; it seems like a lifetime ago."

During the pandemic Sarah quickly adapted, becoming a Tele Friend volunteer and this comment was made in April 2021: "I have a group of ladies, my Golden Girls, that I call regularly. They're all over 80,

all live alone, all have sight loss, all been shielding and housebound. I've shared their highs and lows, we've laughed and cried, what I don't know about the '40s and '50s isn't worth knowing! Yesterday, I rang them all. I managed to talk to two of them, both were sat in their gardens full of positivity full of plans, a pure joy. The others were all OUT! Spent today calling them and the difference was immense as they had all been out of the house with a loved one. All so much to tell me, where they'd been. Some had gone to their children's house, or just for a walk. Again, all full of plans and positivity for the future. I feel like a proud parent seeing them spread their wings! And so thankful they have all kept safe and free of this virus and very humble."

During the pandemic presentations were adapted to suit online methods while restrictions didn't allow in-person sessions, however we were delighted to begin in-person groups again as soon as we were able.

Sarah's story made a big impact on many people and helped to enable many to come to terms with their sight loss by being a shining example of the happiness that can be found through acceptance. "People tell me I am an inspiration, but for me it's just about going out and getting a life which makes you happy."

*Right:  
Sarah when  
she won the  
Women of  
Sheffield  
Award in  
2022*



## Chapter 5: The workshops

The charity was established to create and operate the workshops. In the 67 years they were run by the institution, they were rebuilt twice albeit on the same site, which itself was enlarged over time.

The first premises were taken on lease in the yard behind a stationer's shop on West Street, consisting of several cutlers' workshops, which were cleaned and fitted with frames, tables and other equipment.

**The workshops occupied most of the basement and the first and second floors and there was additional warehousing space in the attic**

The initial object of the institution was "to instruct the blind in trades, so as not only to afford them an agreeable employment in which to pass their time, but also to enable them to earn their livelihoods".

The 'Industrial School for the Blind', as it was initially known, opened in 1860 with 15 pupils, including several men of middle age, three or four youths and five or six women of varying ages. Soon afterwards, the number of applicants made it necessary to accept new pupils only on recommendation and following careful scrutiny. It was to be a recurrent theme that there were never enough positions to meet demand.

Originally, the teaching staff consisted of two men and two women. The men were local and had previously worked in their trades at home. The women both came from London institutions where they had already had experience in teaching the blind. Lucy Swallow taught brush-making

and Sarah Slack instructed women in fancy basket-making.

The pupils worked from nine until five with a break for dinner and lived with their families or friends. Special arrangements were made to guide those who were initially unable to find their way to and from the school. Instruction was free and a small wage was paid. A shop was opened on West Street and, apart from wages, most of the proceeds went on buying materials and paying the rent and teachers.

Disciplinary issues were prevalent in the early minutes of the institution. Some of the workers had to be discharged and one was fined for striking one of his fellows. In April 1864 it was determined that the rules should be read out every Monday morning and should be strictly enforced. Anyone not ready at 9am to receive their work would not be given it until 1:30pm. Ten years later smoking by blind workers was banned because of the risk to the premises, a fine of sixpence for each infringement to be deducted from wages.

In 1868, following an appeal, sufficient funds were raised for the charity to acquire the workshop and adjoining premises



which would be used for the shop. The operation, however, struggled to be self-supporting and still relied on voluntary donations. The public were regularly exhorted to help the charity by buying goods from the shop which, at times, due to competition was forced to sell goods at a loss.

In 1871 the manager Isaac Ibbotson died and was replaced by William Senior. At the 1873 AGM a sorry picture was presented. 18 people were employed at the manufactory, four of whom were women, but employment was not full time, as the premises were closed on Mondays to enable the manager to prepare materials, attend his books and look after orders and accounts. Joseph Gamble, one of the committee, and chairman of the meeting said “he thought the present Blind



*New workshops opened 10 January 1884 by the Earl of Wharncliffe* Picture Sheffield

Institution was a disgrace to Sheffield. Its operations were carried out in a wretched and dilapidated building, which was almost ready to tumble down”. (Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 6 March 1873). However, with attention focused on building the school on Manchester Road, it was not until 1881 that plans to demolish and rebuild the West Street premises were approved to go ahead.

**By 1885, 45 people were employed in the new enlarged workshops but, again, not all those who applied could be appointed**

The frontage of the new building was a retail shop, with large plate glass windows, behind which was a committee room and library, a warehouse and a room that was to be used as both the workers’ dining room and the Sunday school for blind children.

The workshops occupied most of the basement and the first and second floors and there was additional warehousing space in the attic. Above the shop was accommodation for the shopkeeper.

By 1885, 45 people were employed in the new enlarged workshops but, again, not all those who applied could be appointed as there was not sufficient demand for the goods made and sold to support them. Experiments with new forms of manufacture, such as the wire department, were not always successful, although others such as chair-caning were more so – in 1890 over 1,000 chairs were re-caned at West Street.

Wages paid were an ongoing issue between those training and working and the organisation with its attempts to be self-supporting. From 1865, in part

to reduce wages, the workshops were closed on Mondays and this remained a long running source of tension. However, in the 1891 annual report it was claimed that “it has been the custom to pay our blind employees at rates which the prices obtainable for their work do not justify”. A sub-committee estimated that wages paid were about 35 percent higher than they would have been to sighted employees. “This, of course, makes the trade account unsatisfactory, showing, as it does an annual loss; but the committee feel that the ordinary earnings of blind workers must in one form or another be supplemented to enable them to be independent of the poor-law authorities”.

In July 1896 the Sheffield Daily Telegraph reported falling sales, “subscriptions are decreasing, the supporters lost not being replaced; and the profit and loss account shows a considerable deficit. If this state of affairs continues the management will either have to employ a less number of the industrious blind or the hours of labour will have to be shortened in order to find work for all. Neither plan is to be commended and with a view of avoiding their adoption it was decided to make an appeal to the public for more aid. The appeal took the form of a garden fete held yesterday at the Institution for the Blind, Manchester Road and it answered a double purpose. Not only was a considerable sum realised but many people were given an opportunity of seeing the goods manufactured so that they may know the kind of work they are asked to assist.”

This did not stop the workers looking for other ways to supplement their income, as the advert above right shows.

## The Blind Vocal and Instrumental Christmas Party.

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DEAR SIR OR MADAM,

Kindly allow us to draw your attention to our Vocal and Instrumental Party.

We are for the most part working at trades, some in the Blind Institution, West Street, and others at home; but unfortunately our earnings, through no fault of our own, are too slender to keep us properly respectable without a little outside help.

Our object in forming this party is to endeavour to obtain a little aid to assist us to keep a respectable appearance, and in soliciting your kindly help we shall be pleased if you will allow us to come and sing for you on Christmas Day. We will come at any time during the day which will be most convenient to you, and at least the time as our engagements will permit.

Those who may not desire us to sing, can aid us very much by their subscriptions.

Any communication addressed to Mr. G. DE BURNHAM, Blind Institution, West Street will have careful attention.

We are, Dear Sir or Madam,  
Yours respectfully,

C. MELLOR, P. CASTLE, W. MELLOR,  
G. DE BURNHAM, W. H. GOUGH, P. MARSHALL,  
P. TAYLOR, S. ROBERTS.

*Advert for 1896 Blind Vocal and Instrumental Party*

In 1898 a change was introduced to the way in which bonuses were paid and the next year, for the first time in many, the manufactory did not make a loss. However, the level of bonuses reduced and the number employed had dropped from 47 to 34.

After the council required that the frontage of the old building be knocked down as West Street was widened to take the new tramway, the workshops were temporarily moved to Pinfold Street and the shop elsewhere on West Street, as building work was again carried out. The third and most imposing building was opened in 1906.

Insights had been gained from visits to similar organisations elsewhere in the country and, as well as the workshops, the building included warehousing, a large retail shop, dining room, meeting room, committee room, separate basket and brush making departments and caretaker's accommodation, all spread over three floors plus cellars. The Sheffield Daily Telegraph reported that the new building "is a decided acquisition to the thoroughfare... and it is to be hoped that other business premises erected in West Street to the new building line will have an equally effective appearance".

By 1907 the workshops were operating four looms and a trimming machine in the

mat department; three Swedish looms, three round stocking machines and a flat machine for garments in the women's and girls' department; a machine for splitting and planing willows in the basket shop and apparatus for making firelighters. Within two years the workshops were providing training for boys and girls who had left the Manchester Road school. The Local Education Authority gave an annual grant and contributed towards machinery and offered bursaries for use in the workshops. More items of equipment were acquired and between them the manufactory and the shop generally returned a small surplus. Numbers employed rose again and by 1913 there were 36 men, ten



*The 1906 Workshops on West Street*

women and 13 “learners”. Disputes over wage levels continued throughout the war and the National League of the Blind wrote regularly to the organisation on issues of pay and conditions. The payment of a war bonus was described as ‘altogether inadequate’ whilst the Workers’ Union protested against the ‘scandalously low pay of the blind workers at the institution’.

In 1915 an arrangement was made with the Ecclesall and Sheffield Workhouse Guardians, whereby several itinerant musicians were taken off the streets and taught various occupations at the institution. The Guardians paid their wages and contributed towards the cost of machinery and supervision and agreed to purchase as many goods as possible from the workshops. The scheme was only a partial success, as one of the men died, one went to Morecambe for the summer and a third chose to return to the streets for the summer months but agreed to return to the workshops over winter.

The matter was a cause of some dispute, with the Guardians withdrawing funding and the institute threatening to hand back care of the individuals concerned. However, it had demonstrated the need for local bodies to work together.

A conference had taken place between the council, the Poor Law Guardians and the institute in 1914, when the institute reported that its records showed there were 420 blind people in the city, of whom 37 were known to be begging in the streets. In 1919, the council reported that in the city there were 12 blind persons selling newspapers or begging, 35 in receipt of outdoor relief, 23 in Poor Law institutions, 64 employed at the workshops, 87 receiving some subsistence from the institution’s home mission and nine receiving pensions from the institute. In 1921, the council formulated a Blind Person’s Scheme, which involved working closely with the institution but which recognised “the need



*Mat making*

for strict economy and the necessity for encouraging the voluntary side of the work”

Following the Blind Persons Act 1920 the workshops were recognised by the Ministry of Health as being eligible to receive grants and it was hoped that this would result in their further development, working in conjunction with the city council. However, at the same time the economy was in recession and although the institution was able to retain its workers and keep them continuously employed, as trade slumped and sales reduced the result was a large accumulation of stock. Once again, the people of Sheffield were called upon to help secure jobs for blind people by buying goods from the shop.

By 1925 trade was improving and the grant from the council was substantially increased. As a result of the number of blind people waiting to start training for subsequent employment, a five-year lease was taken on premises at 140 - 144 West Street to house the women’s section and

a new department was opened for the manufacture of all kinds of knitting wear. This created positions for people on the waiting list, but the institution “cannot undertake fresh responsibilities without substantial help from the Local Authorities”. The following year the council agreed to fund the admission of nine more people to the three-year training programme, after which they should have been “capable of earning a substantial part of their livelihood”. However, 12 people still remained on the waiting list and the institute pleaded for the council to fund them. “It is an alternative between making them into useful and happy citizens or leaving them entirely dependent and more or less miserable.”

A new motor van was acquired to provide a better service for customers and to display goods for sale in outlying districts. By 1927 there were more people in the workshops than ever before, a total of 93, with 68 employed and 25 under training.



*Knitting, weaving and chair caning*



Ironically, this high-water mark was to be the end of the institution's running of the workshops. The wrangling with the council over funding had continued, the more so after a Labour majority was elected in 1926; in a letter to the Sheffield Independent on 9 April 1927, the institute's chairman, Sydney Robinson, set out its position: "Under the Blind Persons Act

**A new motor van was acquired to provide a better service for customers and to display goods for sale in outlying districts**

1920 the corporation may take charge of the blind people in their district. The last two or three years the Sheffield Corporation have been working in a half-hearted way with the Blind Institution. Under the various acts the institution is brought under the inspection of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education, all of which expect the institution to carry out their

requirements, among which are conditions and regulations which cost more money than the income of the institution from its voluntary funds could afford. During the last four or five years we have overspent our income by some £7,000 or £8,000 a state of affairs which my Board feels cannot continue".

The institution had set out funding requirements to the council but, in return, the council demanded voting control of the board; the institution had offered them six of the 12 board positions, but the council wanted nine. Ultimately, the institution rejected the council's proposals and, as a result, the council took over the running of the workshops in September 1927. For a short time, they continued at West Street, but on 23 October 1930, the New Workshops for the Blind were formally opened on Sharrow Lane. The institute retained the West Street site, renting it out until it was sold in 1999 and the building can still be seen today.



*The new motor van*

## Chapter 6: The School for Blind Children

**O**n April 24 1875, an old lady died at Newbold, near Chesterfield, and it was to transform the institution. Caroline Davenport had been the sister of Daniel Holy, who himself had died in 1870 and was buried in the family vault at Fulwood. In his will, he bequeathed to the Town Trustees of Sheffield the residue of his estates (about £26,000), with the annual income, subject to an annuity for the maintenance of the vault, to be paid to the North of England Manufactory for the Blind, West Street, provided that a building within the parish of Sheffield, suitable in the opinion of the Town Trustees for the purposes of the institution, be erected or purchased and made ready for the

**A year later, in 1876, a local architect had prepared sketches of how the school might look and potential costs were estimated at around £23,000**

reception of blind people within five years of the death of Mrs Davenport. However, the endowment could not be used towards the cost of the building, the funds for which would need to be raised separately. Daniel Holy requested that the school should be conducted on the same lines as the institution at Edgbaston, Birmingham.

In May a meeting was held with the Town Trustees and over the summer visits were paid to blind schools around the country. At the annual meeting in October, presided over by Lord Wharncliffe, it was resolved to proceed. Potential sites were identified but the magnitude of the task was becoming apparent. A year later, in 1876, a local architect had prepared sketches of how the



*Drawing of the School*

school might look and potential costs were estimated at around £23,000, an enormous sum at that time. It was recognised that the help of the town as a whole would be needed if the necessary funds were to be raised.

Samuel Roberts of the Town Trustees chaired a meeting at the Cutlers' Hall on 16 November 1876, "for the purpose of advising on the best means for securing the bequest of the late Daniel Holy". This in turn led to a further meeting there on December 19, which was called for the purpose of raising funds and was presided over by the Mayor, Alderman Bassett, who himself donated £250. A town's committee was established to work alongside the institution's committee to secure the project. The town's committee held 27 meetings over the coming months and established sub-committees for canvassing local people to raise the money required. Samuel Roberts was elected chairman and James Barber treasurer of the town's committee and they were instrumental

in driving the project forward. Samuel Roberts had been appointed a vice-president and James Barber a trustee of the institution and both were Town Trustees.

In total nearly £15,000 was raised, Samuel Roberts donating £1,000 personally and the Town Trustees £500. Local businesses, businessmen and nobles were among the other nearly 500 contributors. Once the school opened further gifts were to flood in: pianos, clocks, two harmoniums, furniture and books in tactile Braille and Moon reading systems.

Two acres of land were acquired on Manchester Road and Flockton and Abbott appointed architects and, once some tenders had been received, building costs were now estimated at £15,000, the final costs being just slightly less but all covered by the funds raised.

The school was opened on 24 September 1879, by Samuel Roberts “and considerable interest was manifested in the proceedings by a large and influential gathering”. It was a large stone building, three stories high, with extensive cellars and two acres of grounds. It was divided into two wings, one for girls and one for boys and each had its own staircase and side entrances to separate playgrounds. On the ground floor was a dining room, classroom, workrooms, committee room, matron’s room, kitchen, pantries and washhouse. Bedrooms and bathrooms were on the first floor with a sickroom in each wing and a nurse’s room common to both. In between the separate wings was the superintendent’s accommodation. Resident teachers and domestic staff had rooms in the attic.

The classrooms and a dining room on the ground floor were the only spaces in which boys and girls came together and even then they had their own appointed places. The dining room had long trestle tables. The children not only dined here, they also attended two religious services each day and returned at 7pm to be read to.

William Wood, former head of a blind school in Regent’s Park, was appointed superintendent and in the first year 22 pupils were taken on, “11 of each sex, only three or four of whom had previously received any suitable education”. Costs for children living in the parish of Sheffield

**Once the school opened further gifts were to flood in: pianos, clocks, two harmoniums, furniture and books in tactile Braille and Moon reading systems**

were £7 per annum for the under twelves and £10 for those over that age; for children outside the parish the rates were £10 and £12 respectively. The Poor Law Act 1879 empowered guardians to subscribe to institutions for the blind and arrangements were made with the Sheffield and Ecclesall Unions to take a number of children from each at lower than the published rates. Parents who could afford to pay the fees were expected to do so. Others could seek help from charities such as the Gardner’s Trust for the Blind, set up in 1879, to give educational and other grants to blind persons of all ages across the country. However, sometimes even this help was not sufficient. In 1889 both Hannah Allen of Sheffield and Bertice Barber of Totley were kept at home by their parents. “In both these cases the school fees were partly paid by the Gardner’s

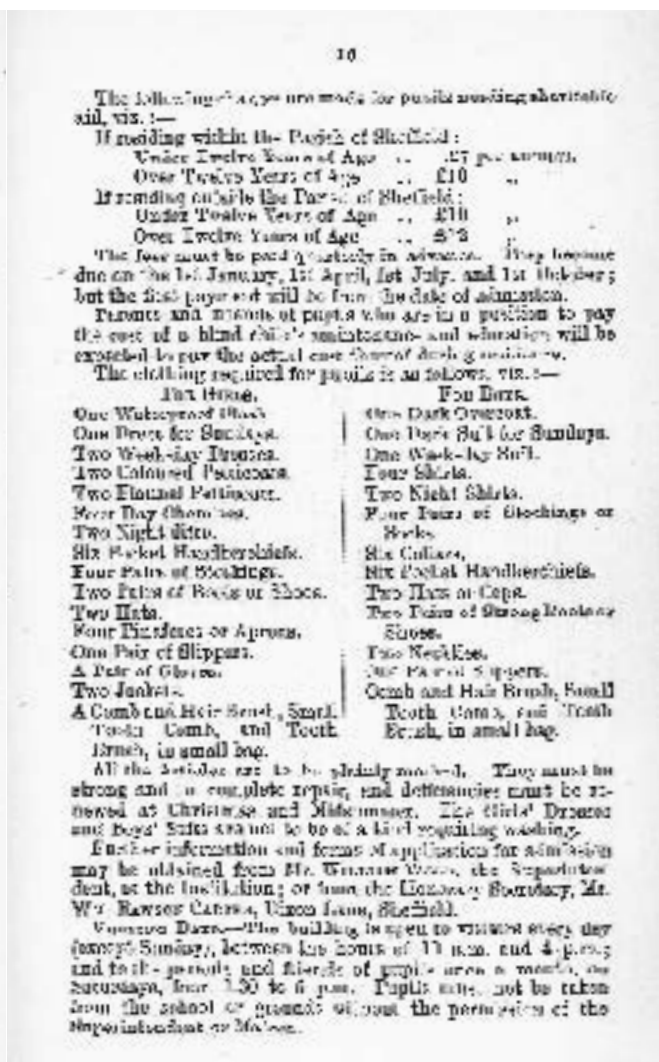
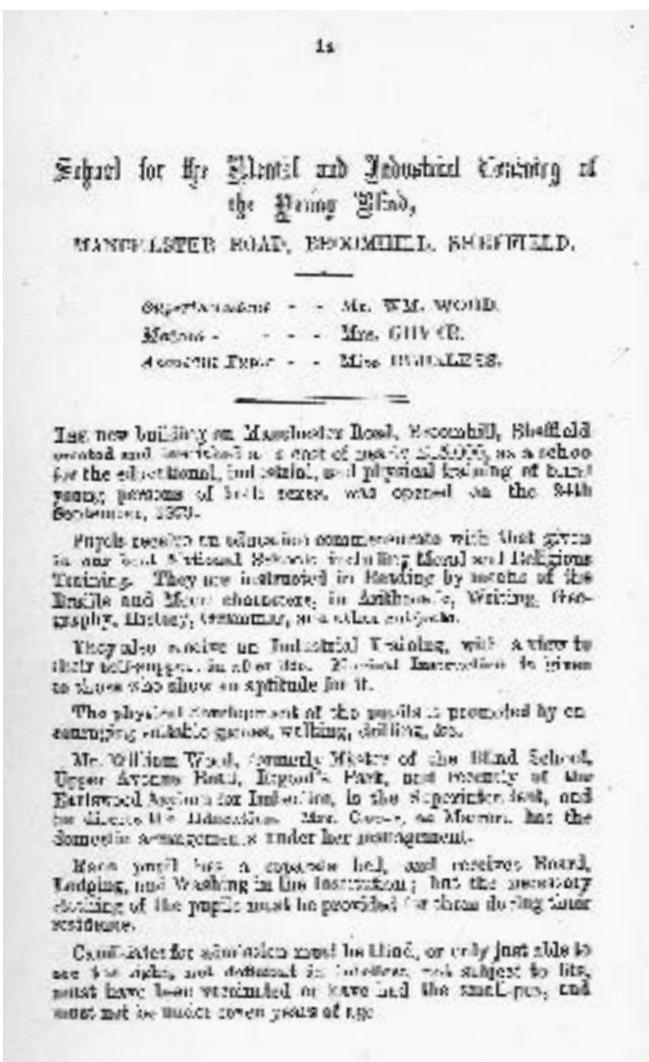
Charity, but the parents could not raise the small remainder.”

So far as possible a normal school curriculum was followed, with reading, arithmetic, writing, geography, history, grammar and “moral and religious training”. It was necessary to decide which of the various aids available should be used for teaching and it was settled on Braille as “this system can be easily read and written and it is adapted to music.” There was another system invented by Doctor Moon of Brighton, using raised letters, which was also learnt as many books of the time were printed using it. Arithmetic was taught with the Taylor

arithmetic frame utilising pegs and a frame with octagonal star shaped holes; geography by means of embossed maps and raised globes.

Pupils learnt music using Braille and many learnt to play the piano. Hymns sung at morning and evening prayers and grace at meals were accompanied by one of the pupils taking turns at the piano. In 1885 a small organ was acquired and seven children began having lessons on it.

Teaching handicrafts was considered vital as part of training for future employment. Boys were taught chair-caning, basket making and shoe repairing, whilst the girls and younger boys learnt knitting, sewing



Extract from 1882 Annual Report

and crocheting. Some of the older children helped in housekeeping: bed-making, dusting and mat beating. The school was boarding and there were only two holidays a year, about five weeks during the summer and three weeks at Christmas. The school and its grounds were therefore very much the centre of the children's lives.

Another focus was on children's health and honorary medical officers were appointed including a physician, a surgeon, an ophthalmic surgeon and, later, a dentist. Physical exercise was encouraged and the extensive grounds were fully utilised. Mr Wood measured the paths and recorded pupil's distances travelled. In an eight-week period in that first year one boy covered 466 miles and five other pupils over 100 miles each. The following year an outdoor gymnasium was built. Physical exercise combined with a well-balanced diet significantly improved the health of many of the children. At the end of the first year it was reported that "the general health of the children has been very good. Most of them have increased considerably in weight".

The 1870 Education Act had been the first piece of legislation to deal specifically with the provision of education in Britain. Existing voluntary schools were allowed to continue unchanged, but the Act established a system of School Boards to build and manage schools in areas where they were needed. The school had been certified by the Sheffield School Board on the basis that not more than a hundred scholars were resident at any one time.

By the mid 1880s a pattern was established. In his report for 1886, William Wood noted that there were now 52 pupils,

who were arranged in six standards, "the qualifications for each being exactly the same as in Public Elementary Schools". Exams were held twice a year. "The School is in three divisions; the 6th, 5th and 4th standards being taught mostly by myself, the 3rd and 2nd by Miss Hepworth and the 1st by Miss Payne, who was formally a pupil, but after spending three and a half years at the Royal Normal School for the Blind, has lately returned as a teacher." In 1882 Annie Payne had won a £40 scholarship from The Gardner's Charity; fees at the Royal Normal School at Norwood were £60 per annum. So long as Annie retained her scholarship the institute had pledged £10 a year from their own funds and her parents paid the remaining £10.

**The concerts were also used to sell goods made at the school and in the manufactory including brushes, mats, baskets and knitted products**

"Music, necessarily, occupies a deal of our attention". The newly installed organ was "of great value" and used to accompany hymns at morning and evening services. During the year several concerts had been held, "all of which were successful musically and most of them financially" (from the sale of tickets), both at the school and out, in places including Penistone, Chapeltown, Rotherham, Worksop and Woodhouse. The concerts were also used to sell goods made at the school and in the manufactory including brushes, mats, baskets and knitted products. The pupils had been taken to five concerts over the course of the year, "all of which they have much enjoyed".

Special boards were used to play chess, with the black squares raised and the black pieces having pegs at the top to distinguish them from the white; matches were played with local clubs.

A collection of models of animals had been procured from Amsterdam, which were used in object lessons and came to form the nucleus of a small museum.

The daily timetable was as follows:

7am	Pupils rise.
8am	Breakfast.
8:30am	Morning prayers.
8:45am	Exercise outside.
9:30am	School Work.
12pm	Exercise outside.
12:30pm	Dinner.
1pm	Recreation.
2pm	School work.
4:30pm	Recreation.
6pm	Tea.
7pm	Prayers.
7:15pm	Reading to pupils.
8pm	Pupils retire.

On Sundays the pupils went to morning and evening services, either to Crookes Church or Fulwood Road Wesleyan Chapel, whilst on Sunday afternoons they attended bible classes run by local ladies. Other ladies came in on weekday evenings to read to the children. In addition the children were examined annually on their knowledge of the scriptures.

From the outset there was a ladies' visiting committee, whose members were appointed at each annual general meeting and who were involved in the domestic management of the school and the general well being of the children. They could

visit daily between the hours of 10am and 4pm, whereas parents and friends were only allowed to visit once a month, on Saturdays between 1:30 and 5pm.

In 1887 the pupils attended the Jubilee celebrations in Norfolk Park but an outbreak of smallpox later in the year led to parents being banned and all contact with the manufactory was suspended, which was to last until May 1888 when the elder boys resumed daily visits there. Five months later the school was visited by the Royal Commissioners appointed to enquire into the condition of blind people who, after a careful examination, "had much pleasure in finding it most

**Health issues were prominent in 1890.**

**In August there was an outbreak of measles brought in by one of the boys on his return after the holidays**

efficiently and satisfactorily conducted". The next year a Hammond Typewriter was purchased, with the hope that training in its use could enhance future employment opportunities. A visit from a School Board Inspector recommended installing fire escapes on the first floor. "This has been done and the pupils are occasionally practised in passing down the canvas shoots that have been provided".

Health issues were prominent in 1890. In August there was an outbreak of measles brought in by one of the boys on his return after the holidays. Eight pupils ended up in hospital, but all completely recovered. The building and drainage were thoroughly inspected by the Medical Officer of Health and alterations were required as a result; the drains were re-laid, some toilets replaced and additional baths and sinks

installed. The honorary surgeon was now visiting each pupil once a month and the dentist once a quarter, whilst the oculist inspected all new students. High pressure filters were placed on all the taps in the kitchen to ensure the water used was pure.

William Wood died unexpectedly in January 1893 and was succeeded by Frank Healey. Following the work of the Royal Commission, the Elementary Education Blind and Deaf Children Act was introduced in 1893 coming into effect from 1 January 1894. The education of blind people was no longer to be left to charities but was to be compulsory and became the responsibility of the School Boards, which had to ensure that it was available for children between the ages of five to 16 in a school certified by the Education Department. On application from the Sheffield School Board the school was duly certified for 70 children. Funding was to come from central government grants and local authority rates and fees were increased for the first time since the school opened.

The piano tuning department was significantly enhanced following a grant from the council and a carpenter's shop was set up to enable woodwork training. The school was now subject to annual inspections and the new superintendent was determined to rise to the challenge: "The course for each class has been carefully mapped out from month to month, examinations have been held upon the work set and the marks gained in each subject duly recorded opposite each pupil's name. By this system the teachers have been enabled to give special attention to the backward pupils.

Reviewing the year's work, I have no hesitation in stating good all-round progress has been made and I look forward to a favourable report from Her Majesty's Inspector".

The school authorities who sent children to the school also made regular inspections. In 1899, after an

**The piano tuning department was significantly enhanced following a grant from the council and a carpenter's shop was set up to enable woodwork training**

unannounced visit, a deputation from the Rotherham School Board wrote in the visitors' book: 'visited the school and were delighted with everything we saw; the children were exceedingly happy and were cheerful in every department'.

The new act was instrumental in bringing in many children whose education would otherwise have been neglected. These included "an influx of very young children, unable to wash and dress themselves and altogether very helpless. The care of these children has caused the matron and teachers much anxiety". In 1895, pupils were sent to the school from the school authorities in Sheffield, Rotherham, Hull, Halifax, Dewsbury, Grimsby, Brigg, Lincoln, Royston, Rawmarsh, Conisbrough, Stockport and Reddish. By now typewriting was taught to all children in the senior school. An Edison-Bell phonograph was acquired and used to play prose, poetry and music to the children. A new hall containing a workshop and gymnasium was opened on 30 March 1896.

Frank Healey was not in post for long and, on June 17 1897, Samuel Maddocks

was appointed as superintendent, a position he was to hold for over 30 years.

Immediately he drew up a new timetable, with the mornings dedicated to school and mental work and the afternoons to technical work and music. For schoolwork the children were divided into classes; "the average number in each class is 12, which is quite large enough, considering the amount of individual attention required." Some of the children were now having swimming lessons at the Glossop Road baths.

By 1900 there were 66 children at the school. Not all were totally blind as the 1893 Act encompassed those "too blind to be able to read the ordinary schoolbooks used by children in sighted schools". Samuel Maddocks reported on the improvement of the eyesight of these

children who were not totally blind once they had begun to attend the school.

"There are five girls and 15 boys whose eyesight has been fairly good. This is no doubt due to the liberal diet, abundance of outdoor exercise and to the rest afforded to the eyes, as we discourage the use of the eyes in their schoolwork, even among those children who are only semi-blind. Their continued residence is allowed in the hope that the improvement may become permanent."

A syllabus and progress register had been created. "The year's work is mapped out into three periods and the progress of each scholar is recorded at the end of each. A complete record for a child's school life is thus preserved for reference." Prizes were awarded for those children making the most progress.

### THE SHEFFIELD BLIND SCHOOL DIETARY TABLE.

	BREAKFAST, 7-9 AM.	DINNER, 12-3 PM.	TEA, 6 P.M.	
SUNDAY	Bread and Milk, Tea, Eggs, and Butter.	Hot Roast Beef, Potatoes, Gravy, Boiled Sweet Puddings, With Jam, Sugar, or Syrup.	Tea, Bread and Butter, varied by Cake, Jam, or Salads.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All the little ones have Bread and Milk for Breakfast; the older ones, Porridge, if they desire it.</li> <li>2. When Milk Puddings are not served for Dinner, children have Milk to drink.</li> <li>3. At Play time, to 4.30 p.m., Biscuits, Bread and Butter, or Bread and Dipping is allowed, about 10.15 each.</li> <li>4. In the Summer, Stewed Fruit and Salads are given when in season.</li> </ol>
MONDAY	Ditto, With Coffee.	Hot-Pyea, Milk Puddings.	Ditto.	
TUESDAY	Ditto, With Cocoa and Dipping.	Stewed Beef, Potatoes, and Greens, Milk Puddings.	Ditto.	
WEDNESDAY	Ditto, With Porridge.	Trich Stew, Boiled Puddings.	Ditto.	
THURSDAY	See Sunday.	Soup, Jam or Treacle, Teats.	Yield.	
FRIDAY	See Tuesday.	Liver and Bacon, Potatoes, Milk Puddings.	Ditto.	
SATURDAY	See Wednesday.	Boiled Mutton, Potatoes, Greens, Milk Puddings.	Ditto.	

Weekly Dietary Table





*The girls' rocking car*

In 1901 the full complement of 70 pupils was finally attained, a knitting machine was acquired for teaching purposes and a stereotyping machine to enable the older students to print and emboss books in Braille for use in the school. Four years later, separate skittle alleys and sandpits were installed for boys and girls, together with a rocking car to carry eight older girls or 12 younger ones.

There were concerns about the development of the children once they had completed their schooling. In Sheffield, many graduated to the West Street workshops. For those from elsewhere an after-care committee was set up and the school prepared reports for the relevant education authorities, containing details about the student's progress and recommendations for subsequent apprenticeships in appropriate institutions. Some former pupils went on

to gain further awards for music. In 1913 Annie Gathergood, who had gone on to Leatherhead to specialise in music, gained a diploma from the Royal College of Organists, as did Osmond Davage the next year at the Royal Normal College; he was to subsequently become a licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music.

**Four years later, in 1905, separate skittle alleys and sandpits were installed for boys and girls, together with a rocking car**

In 1906 the Report from the Board of Education inspection read:

"The appearance of the children is admirable evidence of the care under which they live at the institution. The organisation of the class work is a strong feature of the school and the attainments of the pupils encourage hope that a large proportion will eventually become self-

supporting. This is the best justification for a training which is necessarily expensive. The institution is performing great service to blind education in training year by year a number of expert sighted teachers fit to go out into other schools and to undertake large responsibilities elsewhere.”

In that year alone one of the teachers had become headmistress at the Oldham Blind School whilst another had gone to the school in Leatherhead. In 1912, there were 13 teachers but there had been eight changes in the year and the ongoing need to replace trained teachers created stresses, especially as invariably the replacements were inexperienced staff. In 1908 the national College of Teachers of the Blind was set up to provide suitably trained teachers and Samuel Maddocks was appointed to its general council.

When war broke out in 1914, the school had only eight pupils from Sheffield and 62 from elsewhere. As in earlier years the annual report listed details of all the pupils, including their place of residence and cause of blindness. Of the 70, 30 had a form of ophthalmia, most usually ophthalmia neonatorum, inflammation of the eyes developed soon after birth. Samuel Maddocks wrote: “Undoubtedly the most important action ever taken to lessen the sum of human misery arising from blindness is the circular issued by the Local Government Board, on February 6, covering a general order making ophthalmia neonatorum compulsorily notifiable in England and Wales from April 1. As a result of this step a large proportion of the blindness contracted in childhood will certainly be prevented.”

During the war the playing fields were

“utilised for food purposes with the result that we have had a plentiful supply of potatoes and vegetables all the year round. The thanks of the committee are due to Mr Bowles who kept us supplied with manure free of cost including cartage. The fact that the boys helped the gardener appealed to him immensely.” In 1915 the children gave a concert to the wounded soldiers at Lydgate Lane Military Hospital and gave up their annual Christmas party so that money could be given to the British Red Cross Society. They also had two visits from Belgian refugees to listen to concerts and view their work,

**Of the 70, 30 had a form of ophthalmia, most usually ophthalmia neonatorum, inflammation of the eyes developed soon after birth**

at the second of which the band of the Hallamshire Rifles played in the school grounds. In 1917, the children were given free tram trips to hear Admiral Sir John Jellicoe and Lieutenant-General Smuts at the Empire Theatre.

Inflation rose significantly during the war, reaching over 25 percent in 1917. After the war, the Board of Education approved the doubling of fees to £42 for children from Sheffield and £50 for others, but this was still the lowest in the country, as a result of the money received from the Daniel Holy bequest. As it had been since the school was built, (and still is today) this was in the order of £850 a year. On 1 January, 1920, the revised LEA scale of salaries for teachers was adopted by the school. Salaries and fees were to increase again in 1921.



### *Be prepared*

Of the fourteen pupils who left in the year to March 31 1921, seven had been recommended for one of basket work, brush work, boot repairing or typewriting in Sheffield, Manchester and Nottingham, one was sent for hospital eye treatment and one was “mentally defective”; two were not “blind within the meaning of the Act” and these, together with three others whose sight had improved, were allowed to leave before the age of 16, to take up sighted work.

Other leavers in subsequent years went into piano and organ tuning, teaching and farming, whilst some won scholarships to study music.

In 1923/4 the compliment of pupils was raised from 70 to 80 and 17 of the boys enrolled as scouts; in June 1924 a parents’ day was introduced and was considered a great success with over 40 parents

present. Mr and Mrs Maddocks retired as superintendent and matron respectively on March 31 1928, and were replaced by Mr and Mrs G.W. Bloomfield from Birmingham, who brought with them new ideas and approaches.

### **The usual Christmas party was enhanced with a musical play, performed by the students**

During their first year the usual Christmas party was enhanced with a musical play, performed by the students. The boys’ playroom was transformed into a theatre with stage and scenery set up by the staff and the music teacher providing training in the musical elements. “It was shown to be one more department in which blind children are able to triumph over their disability and to find scope for self-expression and wholesome enjoyment,

whilst the educational value to the children can hardly be overestimated. The experiment amply justified itself and it is hoped this attempt is the prelude to a wider field of dramatic work. A repeat performance was given for the entertainment of the children's parents, at which performance a surprise was provided by Mr and Mrs J.D.

Brittain of Crosspool, in the form of a gift of a new half-crown to each of the 80 delighted scholars. At the conclusion of the play, Father Christmas found his way into the room and



*Paddling at Cleethorpes*

distributed additional presents which were the proceeds of a cheque received by him from Mr. Skelton Cole". In subsequent years the plays included A Christmas Carol, Cinderella and Dick Whittington.



*Basket making, 1932*

In 1929, with the help of the Sheffield Telegraph the children were taken to Cleethorpes for the day. "Even now, months after, it is still voted by individual participants as 'the happiest day of my life'. Three patrols of Girl Guides were formed; leisure time involved the library, gramophone, wireless, indoor and outdoor games, concerts, socials and dancing. The year was divided into three terms rather than two.

Over the following years the curriculum was gradually expanded with French, literary subjects and Esperanto taught to those with an aptitude. A shorthand Braille machine was acquired. Around

**There was a growing emphasis on sports and physical training. An athletic sports day was held on Whit Mondays and football and cricket played**

ten students a year were passing music exams; "apart from the successes by examination reported above, the pupils can enjoy and appreciate good music and much of their leisure time during the winter months was spent in practising old and new part-songs".

There was a growing emphasis on sports and physical training. An athletic sports day was held on Whit Mondays and football and cricket played, a cricket match against the old boys being won by one run in 1932. The next year an inter-school sports meeting was held at White City, Manchester, with blind children from Sheffield, Manchester and Leeds. In later years schools from Liverpool and Preston also took part. Chess was played on winter evenings, together with draughts, dominoes and cards. Literary evenings

were introduced where books were read, discussed and criticised "with the result that the children return to the books with zest and an understanding made possible only with the development of the critical faculty".

On 16 October 1935, new extensions were opened comprising a domestic science room, fitted as nearly as possible to represent the actual experience of the children in later life, two handicraft rooms and a spacious and well-equipped gymnasium. Two new teaching posts were created in physical training and domestic science and within a year, it was reported that the physical condition of the children "has very materially improved".

A house system was introduced, with the four houses competing against each other. "Points may be gained or lost in every phase of school activity. These are recorded each week on a specially constructed board and at the end of each term the name of the most progressive house as shown by the number of points gained, is inscribed on a shield designed for the purpose".

The pupils suggested a school magazine, made up of their contributions, initially known as "Quadruple" but later called "Nil Desperandum". It included stories, poetry, humour and reports on school debates and sporting events. The purchase of a Gestetner duplicating machine meant that copies could be sold at a nominal charge.

In 1939 the honorary ophthalmic surgeon, Percival Hay, confirmed he had completed his usual annual inspection of the whole school, with some pupils having further detailed examinations.

He noted that about eighty per cent of the children had been blind from birth, only twenty percent losing their sight from disease or injury later. "The latter group used to form a very much larger proportion of the children attending blind schools than it does now. It is gradually decreasing as the methods of treatment improve. Already ophthalmia neonatorum, an inflammation of the eyes in the newborn, is rapidly disappearing and thus one of the most important causes of acquired blindness is vanishing." He went on to reflect on the importance of efficient medical treatment in reducing the cases of preventable blindness.

When World War Two began in September 1939, the school had already prepared air-raid shelters in the basement of the main building, the ceilings had been strengthened with steel girders and stanchions, all to the satisfaction of the local Air-Raid Authority. "Dig for Victory" work took place in the boys' recreation ground which was given over to gardening. Otherwise, through the first six months of the war, "the work of the school has proceeded quite normally", in part helped by the pupils being residential.

As the war went on though it began to impact school life. Disturbed nights in the shelters resulted in school hours being reduced, notwithstanding "the magnificent spirit which prevailed amongst the children and staff during many trying experiences". Staff left for military service and were hard to replace, retired former staff came back to provide some cover, the inter-school sports day and Christmas festivities had to be abandoned and, following damage caused in the Sheffield Blitz in mid-December 1940, the children were sent home for an extended Christmas holiday until the end of January. More boys joined the Scouts where there was now

INTER-SCHOOL SPORTS, 1939

June 17th, 1939, was a great day for three schools, namely, the schools for the blind at Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield. The importance of the day was due to the sports in which the three schools were going to compete. The venue was the White City, Manchester.

Everyone was looking forward to this eventful day, even those not entitled to compete. It happened to be one of the lucky ones, and I, too, was simply looking for the day to arrive. No one could talk of anything but the sports, and those who were going made up their minds to bring all the prizes back to Sheffield.

At last, the glorious day arrived: everyone was in a state of excitement, and hope. The bus in which we travelled arrived about eleven o'clock, and those who were going entered therein very joyously. The journey to Manchester was very enjoyable. We travelled by way of 'the Strake', and the scenery struck us as being indeed beautiful. At length, we arrived at our destination, and we were very warmly and hospitably received by all at Deanshaw's Institution for the Blind. The first thing we did was to look for our old, though not forgotten friends. We found them in their dormitory, preparing for the day. Later, the pupils of the Institution showed us round the school, after which my friend and I had an interesting excursion on our own.

Soon afterwards, dinner was served. We partook of the meal in the concert hall. After an enjoyable half-hour there, we prepared to go to the White City for the Sports, the walk there being very pleasant. The race in which I was particularly interested was the three-furlong, as my friend and I were looking for it. At last, it was time to get ready for the race. We were each given a green sash, which we put over our left shoulder and under our right arm. It was rather chilly when we arrived on the field, but I think the girls made us out all the faster, and I hope to win. That day many medals went to our school, and we were all very proud of them.

After receiving our prizes, which were gold and silver medals, we retraced our steps towards the Institution for another refreshing meal. After tea, we talked about the large, noisy school for quite a while. Then we prepared for the return journey.

We did not enjoy this ride so much as the former one, simply because, I suppose, it was the return journey - our pleasures of the day were over. But, really, we were quite satisfied.

Kinifus Sunfield, Class 6.

an emphasis on ambulance work and morse signalling; three patrol leaders went to Redmires for practice in firefighting and cooking. With rationing, cooking opportunities were limited during domestic science lessons which focused instead on comparing food prices with those in peacetime and looking at war-time recipes. Socks and scarves were knitted for the troops.

By the spring of 1942 George Bloomfield was reporting: "We have not however been without our problems and difficulties, due mainly to the depletion of our domestic staff. At one period 25 per cent only of our normal complement were left and, in September, the gardener, the only man left with us, was called up for military service. A severe winter and difficulty with fuel supplies also created problems, but happily these were gradually overcome".

At times the continuance of the school was in jeopardy.

After 1945 teachers slowly returned from war service, some after six years away. In late 1946 the Ministry of Education, having inspected the three blind schools in the North East, proposed that junior children should be concentrated at Sheffield and Newcastle and senior ones at York. The board approved this proposal and an interchange of students resulted.

The 1944 Education Act placed greater obligations on local authorities and extended their powers. The school had been built in 1879 and some of the accommodation no longer met modern standards. Considerable capital spend would be necessary but could not be justified as the estate only extended to two acres and anyway the institution

did not have such funds available. The Sheffield Education Authority planned to build a new school with up-to-date amenities and equipment but, in the meantime, it determined to take over the site on Manchester Road and carry out some immediate improvements. A seven-year lease on the site at a nominal rent was agreed and the school transferred on 1 April 1947. When the lease expired, the school was acquired by the authority at an agreed valuation of £36,000 and with the approval and consent of the Charity Commission.

The institution continued its association with the school and in 1947 the members of the old school board were asked to serve on a committee of management of the blind school.

Each year, the pupils and staff were invited to a Christmas party at Mappin Street and to the carol service and each of the children was given a Christmas present. In 1977, following a bequest, a minibus was donated to the school, to replace an older one and in the following year, the headmaster, Frederick Tooze, joined the charity's board of management, remaining until his death in 1987. During the 1980s, the charity had many children's books put into Braille to add to the school library.

The new school for blind children never did get built. Frederick Tooze had pioneered the integration of students into the local comprehensive schools in the 1960s and 1970s and, on 1 January 1997, with the number of pupils down to 12, the school closed. The building, on Manchester Road, remains, having been converted to residential flats.

# Chapter 7: Overend Cottages and Cairn Home

**M**rs Overend of West Retford House, in Retford, the widow of the late William Overend Q.C., sometime leader of the West Midland Circuit Bar, died in December 1896, aged 83. A benefactress, amongst other gifts, she had donated £10,000 to help fund the Sheffield Convalescent Home and built a church in Tinsley. In her will she left £75,000 in charitable legacies, £2,000 of this to the Sheffield Institution for the Blind.

It was determined that the best use of this legacy would be to build cottage homes for aged blind people, although this required extending the original objects of the charity. In 1899, land on Selborne Road was acquired for £453 and a contract awarded to William May, of Walkley, to build six residencies at a price of £1,364.

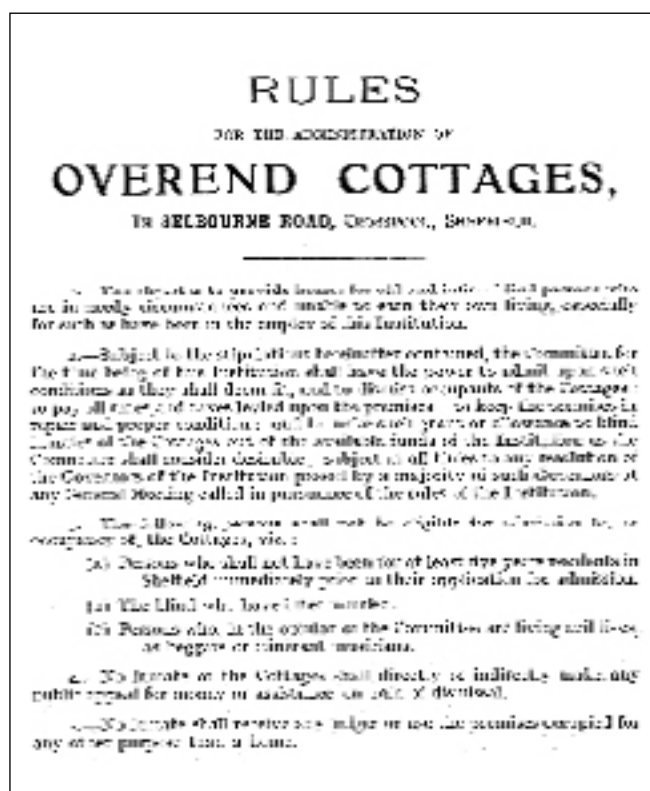
The cottages were opened on September 29 1900, by the chairman, Alderman William Carter. At either end were two larger three bedroomed cottages. The central buildings were built as flats, each having a living room, bedroom, pantry, coal house and toilet. There was also a communal garden plot for the use of the occupiers.

Tenancies were handed out to five former employees of the West Street workshops, J.C. Bletcher, Thos. Howe, Chas. Jackson, Sarah Ann Hartley and W. Johnson. The next year the sixth cottage was also occupied and arrangements were made with the wife of one of the blind tenants to utilise part of their cottage as a



*Overend Cottages*

convalescent home. The institution paid the rates, taxes, gas and water charges for the tenants and, in addition, paid them a small weekly pension.



*Rules of Overend Cottages*



Only half the land on Selborne Road had been used and it was originally intended that, once sufficient funds were available, more cottages would be built to provide comfortable accommodation for retired former workshop employees. In fact, it was to be 34 years before the vacant plot was utilised and then in a different way.

**On August 17 1934 the foundation stone of Cairn Home was laid by Mrs Sarah Murfitt, who was blind herself**

On August 17 1934 the foundation stone of Cairn Home was laid by Mrs Sarah Murfitt, who was blind herself and who had donated £1,000 in memory of her parents, which accelerated the development of the home. She was back just over a year later to perform the opening ceremony with a chromium-plated engraved key, which was dedicated “to the Glory of God and to

the blind men of the city” by the Rev. H.C. Foster, the vicar of Ranmoor. The home was designed for the accommodation of 12 blind men with a resident steward and staff and was so planned that a further wing could be built for women.

The dining room and kitchen were built sufficiently large for this purpose as were connecting corridors to link up with the future extension.

Mr and Mrs Cutt had been appointed caretakers in March 1935, the home opened in October but by March 1936 they had resigned and were replaced by Mr and Mrs De Pledge.

Members of the Ranmoor Church Young Men’s Society and the Rover Scouts began regular visits to read to the men and play games, a role that seems to have been subsequently taken on by the West Sheffield branch of TOC H.



*Cairn Home, 1936*

**"TRAGEDY IN SHEFFIELD. BLIND MAN'S STRANGE CONDUCT. SUPPOSED ATTEMPTED WIFE MURDER. SUICIDE OF THE ASSAILANT. REMARKABLE OCCURRENCE. SHEFFIELD EVENING TELEGRAPH TUESDAY 19 AUGUST 1902**

*A remarkable occurrence took place in Sheffield this morning as the outcome of which James Creswick Bletcher, aged 69, who has been blind for years, took his life after attempting the life of his wife, Harriet Bletcher. The parties lived happily together at 56, Selborne Road, off Manchester Road, in what is known as Overend Cottages and nothing seems to have transpired of an unusual character up to the hour of their going to bed last night. A few days ago, the husband had made a remark to his wife, 'Let's die together', but beyond reproving him for the foolishness of his talk, she took no further notice of it and nothing more of an unusual character occurred. This morning, however, at half-past four, Mrs Bletcher was awakened by a sharp pain in her chest and she quickly discovered that she had been stabbed with some sharp instrument. Her husband was standing by the side of the bed and in his hand was a table knife. She jumped out of bed, took the knife from him and, running downstairs, raised an alarm. Some neighbours came in and, one of them, Mrs. Kinman went in search of a constable. She found P.C. (188) Spencer in Tipton Hill Road, and later on being informed that something was wrong at Selborne Road, accompanied Mrs Kinman thither. There he found Mrs. Bletcher bleeding from wounds in the face and hand and she stated that her husband had attacked and stabbed her whilst in bed. She also stated that he had asked her to drink of some liniment which there was in the house, making the remark previously alluded to. After she had come downstairs, she said her husband had followed her and procured another knife. This she and a neighbour took from him and it was in doing so that she received*

*the injury to her hand. At the time the constable arrived Bletcher was upstairs and Spencer, accompanied by Sergeant Stothard, who had joined him, on going up found the room door locked. As Bletcher refused to open it when asked, they burst the door open and, going into the room, found him sitting down. He stated that himself had taken some of the liniment before alluded to and no time was lost in sending for medical aid. Dr Stokes arrived, and he administered emetics which had a beneficial effect, the man rallying and becoming quite rational in his demeanour. He also commenced to partake of some breakfast and, when the doctor left, was apparently all right. About an hour later, however, he suddenly collapsed and became unconscious. The doctor was again sent for, but this time his services were of no avail, and the man died at 11 o'clock.*

*There appears to have been no trouble existing between the couple, who seem to have lived on uninterruptedly good terms and no explanation is forthcoming of Bletcher's extraordinary conduct. Mrs Bletcher's injuries are not of a serious character, none of the wounds being very deep. It is a remarkable circumstance that on the lower part of Bletcher's body a number of small puncture wounds were discovered and also a more severe wound in the form of a cross cut some four inches in length. These are apparently a few days old and lead to the opinion that the unfortunate man has previously attempted his life, though his efforts at self-destruction in these cases appear to have been of a comparatively undetermined character. Mrs Bletcher remains under surgical care, whilst her husband's body now lies awaiting the Coroner's inquiry."*

In 1938, a New Year's party was held with tea, entertainment and an impromptu concert, to which the residents of Overend Cottages were also invited. Residents began attending local concerts and welcomed "friendly chats and informal talks given by visitors".

Although initially there had been thoughts of evacuating the residents, the home remained open throughout the Second World War. There were, however, continuing concerns about the language, behaviour and 'filthy habits' of some of the men and, in 1941, rules were drawn up and two men asked to leave.

**Members of the Ranmoor Church Young Men's Society and the Rover Scouts began regular visits to read to the men and play games**

The Chairman began monthly inspections in 1943 and the next year a letter was sent to each resident after complaints about spitting.

Despite rationing, "good food and accommodation was offered to those with slender means of support", although fees were raised by one shilling a week in 1941. The Christmas parties were considered just as good as in peace time and traditional entertainments and visitations continued. As the war drew on it became increasingly difficult to obtain staff and by 1945 it was no longer possible to accommodate a full complement of residents.

After the war, in 1946, the home was redecorated and Mr and Mrs Templeman were appointed steward and matron respectively. Cairn was also becoming something of a social centre, with the

blind residents of Crosspool meeting there for gatherings and concerts. At Overend Cottages, air raid shelters were removed from the gardens, three of the flats had hot water systems installed and two had baths.

The National Assistance Act of 1948 had formally abolished the Poor Law system that dated back to Tudor times.



*The sitting room at Cairn Home*

The residents at Overend now received National Assistance and out of this paid an element of the rent although the greater portion was paid by the council. Amongst other provisions, the act obliged local authorities to provide suitable accommodation for those who through infirmity, age or any other reason needed care not otherwise available. Alternatively, the local authority could provide financial assistance to volunteer organisations providing such services and this was the arrangement reached with Cairn.

It was not until the Manchester Road school building was sold to the council in the 1950s that the funds became available to add the extension for women envisaged when the home was originally built. Work commenced in 1957 and the extension opened in April 1959, at a cost of nearly £27,000. Mr and Mrs

Templeman's salaries were increased by over twenty-five percent and they received compensation for the disturbances whilst the extension had been built. Soon the home was full with 26 residents and it was hoped that with increased fees it would be nearly self-supporting.

Mr Templeman died in 1961 but his wife continued in post until she resigned in 1966. Mr and Mrs Aspinall were appointed but were to last less than a year, as staff relations deteriorated and vacancies proved difficult to fill. In March 1967 the council assumed responsibility for keeping the home open and, in 1968, took over the running of the home on a 21 year lease. Not only was the lease at a nominal rent, but the charity paid a substantial amount to modernise the property before handing it over and continued to contribute to the running costs.

Towards the end of the lease in 1988, the council closed the home but the charity, determining that it was still required for its original purpose, again incurred significant costs in extensive refurbishments. The council paid £25,000 for dilapidations and



*Dining at Cairn Home*



*Completed extensions at Cairn Home*

an appeal raised £49,000 but total costs exceeded £600,000.

When the home reopened nobody in the organisation had any experience in running one; resident rates were set at a low level and it was hoped to break even, though running costs could only be estimated initially. A former ward sister, Kay Russell, was appointed manager. Tactile tiles had been installed at the entrance and on the garden paths and bright red grab-rails along the corridors. All rooms were ensuite and the lift was fitted with a computerised voice system.

In 1998 Kevin McGrath became manager, a position he was to hold for over 20 years and the next year four of the residents celebrated their 100th birthday.

Plans to further redevelop the Cairn and Overend sites had been first drawn up in 1996 but were substantially revised over the next five years, before work began in 2001 to create four new rooms at Cairn by extending into part of the cottages, finally opening in May 2002. Overend Cottages now consisted of three studio flats with a bedroom, living room/kitchen and bathroom and a two bed roomed cottage.

## Life at Cairn Home

I started working at Cairn Home in 2009 as a Care Assistant. When I first started most of the residents were blind or partially sighted and many were still very independent. Residents could then come into Cairn if they were feeling lonely and isolated at home. Over the years things have changed, care fees have increased, funding is harder to access and people are encouraged and supported to stay at home longer, so now, when they do come to us their care needs are greater. The home continues to specialise in supporting people who are blind, partially sighted or have other sensory impairments.

As the years go by and things move on so do the residents. Only a few years ago we had residents that had been through World War Two from the Parachute Regiment to Land Girls. One of our residents, who is sadly no longer with us, saw Vera Lynn at the very first concert she did overseas. Another former resident's husband was Winston Churchill's driver. We have had professors, barristers and many more amazing people over the years, some remarkable residents and real characters. Our oldest resident at present is 101 and we have two more residents who will be 100 next year.

The garden has changed over the years; when I first started it was a blank canvas of grass and trees. This all changed when Kevin, the previous manager, supported by Friends of Cairn, started to work on it. Now it's a garden of colour, wildlife and beautiful fragrances, where people can sit and enjoy the scenery and the peace and quiet. In 2021 I took over as manager and made some changes myself. We have now started to make use of our

greenhouse and we're growing tomatoes and peppers. We are now working on a vegetable patch so residents can grow their own produce next year.

The building has also changed over the years. We have created more space inside and out. We created an additional seating area for the residents to sit and enjoy the summer and an activities room. We now even have a bar!

Clients' tastes have changed over the years and our menus have had to reflect that; once, our staples were traditional meals of meat and two veg, now we have things like lasagne and curries.

Entertainment has also changed over the years. We used to have a book club twice a week in the evening organised by Fulwood Church but this started to decline as residents changed. We have always had fellowship, again through Fulwood Church but this had to stop during Covid, so one of our staff members took it upon herself to continue the fellowship during this time and continues to do so. The current residents enjoy going out more and watch a lot more television. Technology has been a big change from when I started. Residents now have mobile phones, iPads and Sky TV, we have wi-fi throughout the building. During the last couple of years of lockdowns technology has been a vital resource, enabling residents to keep in touch with family and friends via Zoom, Facetime etc.

Cairn Home has always been a good home with a good reputation, our success is down to our amazing staff who put our residents first because that is what it's all about, a home that is safe and has the utmost respect for the people who live here.

**Amanda Dennett, Cairn Home Manager**



*Gardens at Cairn Home*

# Chapter 8: Support in the Community

The Blind Home Mission and Sabbath School, Sheffield, originated in 1865 when, on 23 July, the Sheffield Sunday School for the Blind was opened in the Temperance Hall on Townhead Street. A benevolent fund was set up for the relief of extreme cases of poverty amongst blind people, which received donations of clothing as well as money and books. As he did for a number of towns in Yorkshire, Sir Charles Lowther provided a complete library in Moon raised print for the blind people of Sheffield, which was located at 14, Corporation Street.

**In 1869 the school formally merged with the home mission run by Miss Lucy Swallow who had made over 1,500 visits to blind people in their own homes**

In 1869 the school formally merged with the home mission run by Miss Lucy Swallow who had made over 1,500 visits to blind people in their own homes. It is likely that this was the same Miss Lucy Swallow who had been one of the initial teachers at the West Street workshops. The 1861 census showed her living with her widowed mother and younger brother on Brocco Street in the West Bar area of Sheffield. It recorded that she had been blind from the age of two.

The merger was not surprising. Lucy's mother was superintendent of the Sunday School and her brother and niece were teachers there, as was Thomas Heath, the librarian at Upperthorpe Library. Although he was 12 years younger than her, he and Lucy married in 1870. In 1873 they moved to Derby when he was appointed

curator at the Derby Free Library, Museum and Art Gallery. Later that year, the Home Mission and Blind School merged with the North of England Manufactory for the Blind. It was a merger that the institution had discussed as early as April 1870 but, although almost all the committee were in favour, Eliza Harrison herself was against. In June 1873 the month after her death, the committee wrote to the Home Mission and Sunday School and, after several joint meetings, the merger was approved by both organisations at a meeting at Cutlers' Hall in October that year.

Miss Sophia Harrison took over the running of the home mission in May 1874 on a salary of £50 per annum and Lucy Heath travelled from Derby to provide her with a day's initiation. In 1877, she made 822 visits to the blind, either in their homes or at the Sheffield Union Workhouse, and gave 146 lessons in reading; 622 books were loaned out by the library. In response to appeals in the local newspapers a considerable quantity of partly worn clothing had been sent to the institution over winter and distributed amongst poor blind people by Miss Harrison.

Sewing meetings were held on Monday afternoons and, in 1879, with 13 members in the group, the average attendance was eight. Between them they turned 181 yards of calico, linen and flannel into clothes for themselves.

State support at this time was grounded in the harsh provisions of the Poor Law with its spectre of the workhouse. Sheffield had two Poor Law Unions which both ran workhouses funded by local taxation.

In the days before the welfare state, the Poor Law Unions provided help for people who were destitute through old age, ill-health, or unemployment. They would either authorise 'out-relief' help for people in their homes or require them to enter the workhouse, seen by many as places of last resort where conditions were no better than in prison. Where it could, the charity provided some assistance. In 1881 £28 was distributed on relief, including £5 spent at Christmas on providing beef, flannel, calico and linen for 44 blind people. Used clothing and shoes were donated and distributed out. In 1889 a fund was raised, supplemented by a complimentary concert and a total of £25 was raised to fund weekly assistance for two blind vocalists. The two vocalists had given their services for many years to the entertainments put on for blind people and were in very needy circumstances. Around the same time, James Howarth set up a fund for sick blind people which was administered by the blind benevolent sick fund committee, distributing three shillings and six pence weekly to blind workers, temporarily unable to earn a living. He wrote: "Handsome as is the provision in Sheffield for the juvenile blind, no adequate provision exists for the adult blind, many of whom are altogether incapable of earning a living themselves even if there was an opportunity for their so doing". 22 people donated a total of over £100 to the fund and a number pledged annual subscriptions. The scheme was in operation for around 50 years but was finally wound up in 1952, after being dormant for several years.

In 1904 rules were finalised for the

administration of a pension fund for the blind. "Pensioners shall be poor blind persons above the age of 21 years, of good character, who from age, ill health, accident, or infirmity, are wholly or in part unable to maintain themselves by their own exertions and who have been resident in Sheffield not less than five years prior to making application for a pension." "Persons living by mendicity, or itinerant musicians loafing in public places shall not be eligible for a pension." The next year a total of over £150 was paid to ten pensioners, several of them at Overend.

At Christmas 1880, with the children on holiday, the Manchester Road school premises were used to put on some entertainment for adult blind people.

By 1882 the number of people on the register to be visited totalled 152, including ten at the Sheffield Union and 26 at the Ecclesall Union workhouses. During 1885 two lectures were given in the workmen's dining room at the West Street premises and more followed in the ensuing years. In 1887, for Queen Victoria's Jubilee, 160 were welcomed to tea and entertainment in the Temperance Hall.

In 1890 the annual report noted the death of one old client, George Lund, aged 80, who, for many years, had sat in Convent Walk selling laces and straps.

In 1897 Sophia Harrison herself died, having been the home visitor for over 23 years. For the next ten years she was succeeded by Miss Louisa Grant. In 1903, the charity subscribed to the National Lending Library for the Blind which supplied books on a monthly basis. Donations included free tickets to attend



local musicals and opera, whilst The Tramway Committee provided free travel for the home visitor each year and a number of free tickets for blind clients.

In 1908, 120 people went to Cleethorpes on the corridor train. Other days out included Haddon Hall in 1910 and the Aviation Grounds at Owlerton during "Aviation Week" in 1914, but Cleethorpes remained a favourite destination.



*Sheffield Aviation Week*

The work continued throughout the First World War. In 1916, 1,920 items were loaned from the library and 1,008 visits made. Although five members died during the year, 27 new names were added to the register. A tea was held in July for members of the workshops and the Sunday school; originally it had planned for March but was postponed "owing to the darkened streets".

At Christmas, gifts were distributed in the shape of beef, stockings, shirts, tea and tobacco and 60 hampers given to particularly needy cases. Most were handed out on December 22, when the friends of the late Miss Howarth presented the women with a handbag and the men with a walking stick as a memento. Miss Howarth had been president of the

home mission committee of the charity and, like her father, a supporter for many years. In 1917 the Christmas funding was considerably increased enabling many more to participate in gifts and 209 parcels of clothes were distributed.

Early meetings of the Sunday School took place in the Temperance Hall and attendance averaged 12 to 15. Once the new building for the manufactory on West Street was opened in 1884, meetings took place in the workmen's room there and attendance soon doubled. Around this time James Howarth began to host an annual tea for attendees, followed by songs and entertainment.

The Sunday School retained close links with the temperance movement and in 1887, the Sheffield Blind School Temperance Association was set up by teachers and past and present pupils of the Sunday School. Within four years the association had 70 members.

A new organ was acquired in 1898 and ten years later a party was held to mark the 70th birthday of the Sunday School Superintendent, Charles Nodder, who was presented with an illuminated address in commemoration of his many years of service.

By now the Sunday School was attended by visitors, ministers and laymen of all denominations and by choirs and soloists. The annual harvest festival was a major occasion, when many gave gifts of food to be divided between the blind members. By 1922, over 40 fruit and vegetable merchants were contributing to the event.

Monthly temperance meetings began in April 1913: "it is hoped by this and other efforts to help the Blind to higher ideals



Illuminated address to Charles Nodder

of life". They continued throughout the war although once again, the "darkened streets" resulted in there being no meetings from September 1916 until the summer of 1917.

After the war activity increased significantly following The Blind Persons Act 1920, which required local authorities to "promote the welfare of blind persons". In 1920, 2,695 home visits were made and home teaching was being expanded. Seven clients were being taught how to read and write in Braille and two in the Moon typeface. Hand knitting was being taught as an occupation. The home visitors were retitled home teachers and the next year, with four of them, 4,276 visits were made. The charity overstretched itself and by the end of the year was down to three teachers due to financial constraints.

The number of registered blind people continued to rise. In the year to 31 March 1924, there were 154 additions, so that at that date there were 598 registered blind being assisted, 488 in Sheffield, 52 in Rotherham and 58 in the West Riding. A superintendent home teacher was appointed, assisted by three others.

As well as Braille and Moon reading and writing, lessons taught included handicrafts such as chair caning, hand knitting, rug making and pulp cane work. A reading circle was set up in 1925 with home teachers reading to workers in the workshops.

By 1927 an exhaustive survey of blind people in the city had been completed and records had been compiled of the home circumstances and conditions of all the poor blind people in Sheffield. However, in

that year, just as it took over the running of the workshops, so too did the council take on most of the aspects of the home mission and by 1928 the charity was focusing on cases that did not come under the civic authority, in particular the care and assistance of unemployable aged and sick blind people.

By 1930 there were two home teachers who made 1,700 visits to individual homes as well as many to the ill in local hospitals. The annual report noted that although in some cases Braille or Moon reading and writing and handicrafts were

**As well as Braille and Moon reading and writing, lessons taught included handicrafts such as chair caning, hand knitting, rug making and pulp cane work**

taught, "many of the cases under our care are very needy and the help taken to them personally means the addition of those small comforts without which life is a bare existence. £1,107 have been expended during the year in pensions and grants and, in the case of sickness, extra comforts such as eggs, fruit etc. have been most acceptable. Most of our blind people possess wireless sets and we are hoping that the remainder may be supplied with them at an early date".

On February 8 1931, the Lord Mayor gave the address to 130 blind attendees at the opening of a new, larger assembly room on Holly Lane off West Street; it had an adjoining kitchen for the provision of refreshments. Attendance at women's meetings on Wednesday afternoons averaged 68 and at the men's on Wednesday evenings around 45.

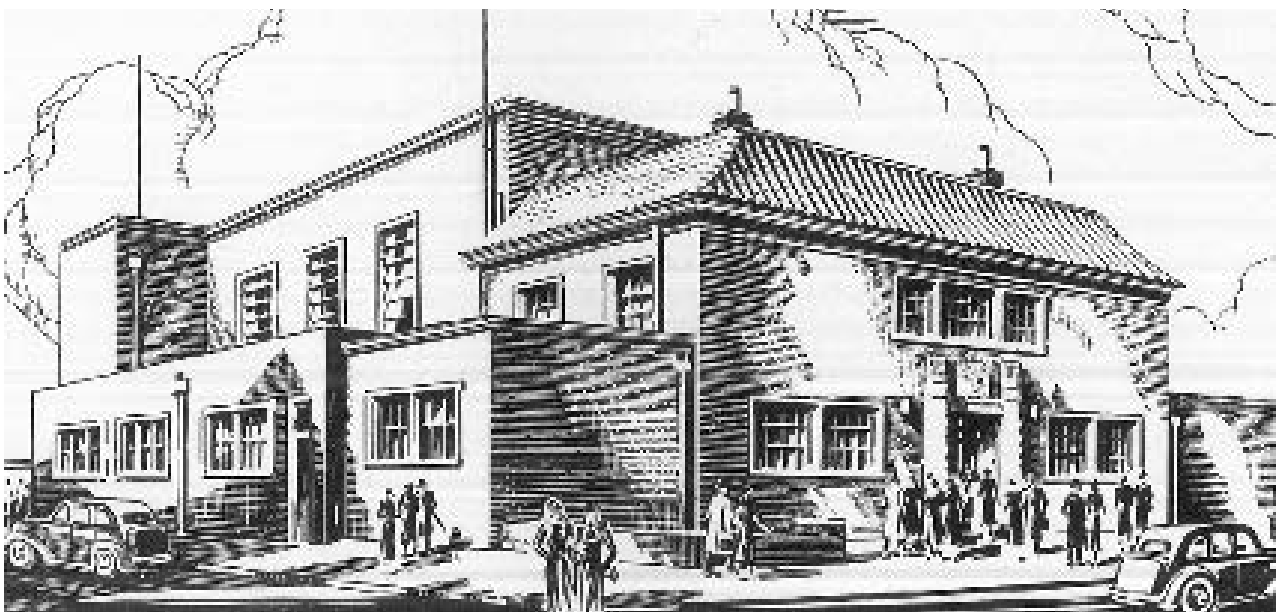
These gatherings were of a social and literary character whilst the monthly combined meetings featured entertainment, often provided by blind people themselves. The editor of *The Star* donated a cabinet gramophone and a selection of records. The Sunday afternoon services continued to be very popular and there were garden parties and teas held during the year. 150 people attended the Sunday School Christmas

**The editor of *The Star* donated a cabinet gramophone and a selection of records. The Sunday afternoon services continued to be very popular and there were garden parties and teas held during the year**

Tea, when a gift of five shillings was given to each blind member. That summer, 190 guests made their way by charabanc for a day out in Cleethorpes. An extra social evening was introduced involving chess, draughts, dominoes and cards, dancing or simply chatting and knitting.

This pattern continued throughout the 1930s. Of the two home teachers it was

noted that “to blind people, especially those who live alone, the visit of a sighted friend, who, in the course of a friendly chat, may render valuable assistance and advice in a variety of ways, is very eagerly anticipated and appreciated”. From the early 1930s, the institution began receiving valve sets from the British ‘Wireless for the Blind’ Fund which were installed free by members of Toc H who helped maintain the sets, later assisted by “one of our blind men who, in spite of his handicap, is very expert in such matters”. Attendance at the Sunday afternoon service averaged around 200, “perhaps the most valuable feature of our social work”. In the middle of the decade handicraft classes were introduced for unemployable men, teaching them pastimes such as rug-making, chair-caning and basket work. The annual Christmas tea for all the blind people in the city became a big event, held on two days in February 1937 at the Lower Cutlers’ Hall, attracting over 850 attendees. In just seven years the institution had outgrown Holly Lane and,



*Mappin Street*

in 1938, work began on a purpose-built site on Mappin Street. It was opened in July 1939, less than seven weeks before the start of the Second World War.

With the advent of war, Sunday services, all mid-week meetings, handicraft classes and concerts were cancelled, although the Sunday service resumed at Mappin Street in April 1940, proving very popular as so many other activities were curtailed. The offices remained open in Mappin Street but, otherwise, the property was let out. The two home teachers continued throughout the war, indeed increasing their number of visits as they proved more necessary than ever.

After the war Mappin Street was redecorated and upgraded, a steward and stewardess appointed and activities gradually started up again. The building contained a stage which was well



*Mappin Street gathering*

equipped and used by groups from across Sheffield for drama, concerts and dinners, with a portion of tickets often provided free for blind attendees. In September 1948 over 800 blind people and their guests took 24 coaches for a day trip to Cleethorpes and over five nights in December that year, more than 1,000



*Mappin Street services*

attended Christmas Dinner at Mappin Street. As well as the Sunday services, there were Monday and Tuesday morning men's clubs, Monday afternoon women's club, Tuesday evening men's meetings, Thursday afternoon religious meetings, a chess club and Thursday evening concerts, whist drives and dances.

There was a further expansion of activities in the 1950s. A blind cricket team was established, annual seaside trips continued but, in addition, blocks of holiday accommodation were booked for a week at a time for clients and mainly funded by the institute. In 1958, six talking book and ten Braille writing machines were acquired to be loaned out. Saturday afternoon sports commentaries were introduced and educational classes begun.

The home teachers also helped provide financial and other assistance to clients. Gifts included bedding, clothing, shoe repair vouchers and grants towards

holidays or decorations. Towards the end of the 1960s coal deliveries were being replaced by grants to help with electricity costs; 759 grants of £2.10s were made in 1969 and 782 of £3 in 1975. In 1977, a grant was made to enable a client called Mr Williams to take part in the world blind chess championship held in Finland, where he finished fifth. Following the introduction of the Disability Living Allowance in 1992, government began making direct payments to a greater number of clients and staff attention turned to helping complete hundreds of application forms.

By the mid-1970s attendances had fallen to single figures at the Sunday services and it was decided to only hold services at Christmas and Easter. However, other activities at Mappin Street were on the increase. In 1977, a Monday lunch club was set up, providing a subsidised hot meal one day a week. Minibuses



*Christmas at Mappin Street*

were acquired to bus clients to the day centre and by 1983, 180 people a week were attending. By 1985, 5,052 lunches were served in the centre and activities included handicrafts, keep fit, hairdressing and chiropody “but, most importantly fellowship”. The two home visitors made 2,945 home visits, monitoring the health and wellbeing of clients and providing advice and information and practical assistance. 445 talking books were being used across the city and Sheffield Talking News used the centre to produce their weekly production.

**Attendances at Mappin Street increased after 1 April 1988, when the institution’s services were extended to partially sighted people as well as those registered blind**

Attendances at Mappin Street increased after 1 April 1988, when the institution’s services were extended to partially sighted people as well as those registered blind. In 1992 a third home visitor was engaged and day activities now included basketry, weaving, felt and paper making, receiving

advice from South Yorkshire Police and the Department of Social Security and numerous talks, socials and concerts. Regular meetings were held by the weekly Braille class, the Deaf Blind club and the Visually Impaired Persons Action Group. The shop supplied equipment at cost to clients. Improvements at Mappin Street included an interview room and the resource room was equipped with CCTV, Easy Reader and other equipment. A few years later a ZY Fuse Machine was acquired which could produce tactile maps and diagrams.

By 2001 there were four home visitors, now renamed community advice officers and a community liaison officer, aided by a growing number of volunteers. The next year a carer’s support scheme was set up, funded by Social Services. This took on the agency for the British Wireless for the Blind Fund and for the RNIB Talking Book Service, by now transitioning from tapes to CDs and provided support to various social and leisure groups, including Braille users, swimming, rambling and gardening. It was becoming clear that the now



*Swimming and rambling groups*

nearly 77 year-old centre was too small and outdated for requirements and it was agreed to demolish it (and, with it, the stage) and replace it with a new centre. The Society moved into their new purpose-built premises on Mappin Street in 2009. A wider range of services and activities could be carried out and the cafe was very popular with visitors. It was a base for the community advice officers providing a benefits and advice service to newly registered clients and an ongoing support service as people needed it. There was a larger product range on display in the equipment centre and a technology officer was appointed to provide advice and training in the use of equipment such as computers, software, mobile phones and GPS navigation services. A range of treatments including

hairdressing, chiropody and aromatherapy were available in the health and beauty room. The wide range of activities such as leisure groups, social groups and children's services all prospered in their new surroundings and Little Sparklers was set up, a pre-school playgroup for children with sight loss. A youth group was created for visually impaired young people with a wide range of activities and occasional outings.

Support groups were established for people with eye conditions such as Retinitis Pigmentosa, Charles Bonnet Syndrome and Glaucoma.

As well as the significant and essential contribution from volunteers, the society also held work placements for students from both medical and social care backgrounds.



*A wide range of high tech equipment is available*



Companies supplying high tech equipment such as electronic video magnifiers, accessible computers and smart phones held demonstration days at Mappin Street. These were always popular with high levels of attendance.

There was also attendance at a range of community events throughout the city and in schools, raising awareness of the charity's work as well as promoting the importance of good eye health to reduce the incidence of sight loss in the future.

SRSB continued to build relationships and work closely with other organisations such as the local Macular Society Group, Sheffield Talking News, which had a studio based in the centre, the council and hospitals.

In 2017 the post of eye clinic liaison officer, providing an information and emotional support service, commenced at

the Royal Hallamshire Hospital, with the society working closely with the hospital and the Royal National Institute of Blind People.

In the same year, the society signed an initial two-year contract to run a new centre in Rotherham, originally renting a property on Ship Hill, which it subsequently purchased just over two years later, after Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council extended the contract. The centre was established to provide social and leisure activities, advice, information, equipment provision and technology training for people with a visual impairment, hearing impairment and dual sensory loss and was named Rotherham Sight & Sound (RSS). 2019 was a year of developing services and raising awareness of the society's work in Rotherham, both with potential



*Talks, meetings and information sessions happen regularly*

service users and other, complimentary, organisations.

The activities centre at SRSB received approximately 160 people each week, providing social and leisure activities as well as refreshments and cooked meals. However, numbers had been slowly

**SRSB continued to build relationships and work closely with other organisations such as the local Macular Society Group, Sheffield Talking News, who had a studio based in the centre, the council and hospitals**

declining for some time, something which was attributed to generational shift. At the end of June 2019, the activities centre stopped operating on Thursdays, with all those who visited that day being accommodated on other days. This meant that a range of activities could run both in and away from the centre.

An average of 170 volunteers supported all aspects of operations, including service delivery at Mappin Street and Ship Hill and in the community, administration, fundraising and marketing.

The impact of Covid resulted in the closure of both centres at times, their reopening with social distancing rules and testing in place until these were slowly relaxed. It also accelerated changes in the way services were being delivered. Some of the minibuses that had been in storage for two years were no longer needed to bus clients into the centres as a new range of activities were introduced held away from the centres and including a variety of sports..

The requirement for Covid testing ceased on 1 April 2022, providing increased flexibility and the opportunity to review and develop all services and activities.



*Cycling*

Within a few months activities and services in the centres and in the community included:

- Community advice on benefits and daily living – appointments also resumed in people’s homes as well as in the centres.
  - Equipment/ technology support/advice and training by appointment in the centres or over the phone and also by visits to tech companies holding demonstration days.
  - Children and young people services including benefits advice and the return of Youth Group, Little Sparklers Playgroup, activity days.
- Training sessions returned including Looking Ahead, Visual Impairment Awareness Training, Introduction to Sign Language, Lip Reading.
  - Social groups including coffee mornings, afternoon teas and evening events.
  - Sports groups run or supported by SRSB/RSS such as shooting, cycling, horse riding, tennis, snooker, football, bowling, walking, swimming, Tai Chi.
  - Leisure groups such as Culture Club, creative writing, painting.
  - Self Help and Support Groups such as Peer Support, Retinitis Pigmentosa, Stargardts, Stroke, and Charles Bonnet Syndrome.



*Football*



*Talks and hairdressing*

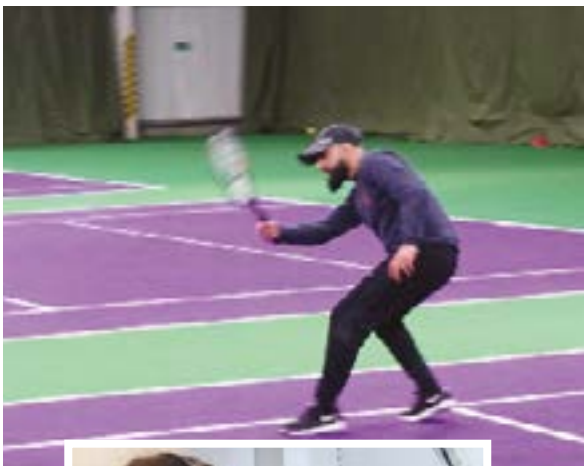
Some of the groups were still delivered in a hybrid way to allow clients to join on their computer via Zoom if they preferred and telephone friendship groups continued to be run weekly. Yoga and meditation classes remained online via Zoom.

A Befriending Services Co-ordinator was appointed to oversee the recruitment and support of volunteers. A My Sighted Guide programme was set up and a counselling service for both clients and staff ran each

week both in Sheffield and Rotherham. A first well-being day was held for clients and staff. A Life Ahead programme was established for newly registered vision impaired people or existing clients.

A course for new hearing aid users was created in Rotherham alongside other dedicated hearing services.

Client numbers continued to grow. By April 2022 there were 6,166, (3,847 in Sheffield, 1,973 in Rotherham and 346 elsewhere.)



*A range of sporting activities take place*



*More activities and community involvement*

## Working in the community

The team of community advice officers has grown and developed significantly over the last 10 to fifteen years.

Their main responsibility is to visit visually impaired people in their own home. They provide a full needs assessment for newly registered blind or partially sighted people and people with a hearing impairment, whilst offering support to existing clients who require assistance with a variety of issues.

The team assesses the requirement for equipment to help clients with everyday tasks and any other issues with the aim of enabling visually impaired people to live as full and complete a life as possible.

In 2006 we were a team of six driving around the community in our Suzuki Wagon Rs. Steadily, as our client base grew so did our team. Rotherham Sight & Sound was opened in 2017 and in 2022 we are now a team of 11.

We have evolved and adapted to meet the needs of our ever-increasing number of clients with a visual and hearing impairment.

Working in the community has and hopefully always will be a privilege. This is why the pandemic was very challenging to deal with. We had always visited people in the comfort of their own homes, we had supported people face to face and now this support ended abruptly.

Things changed and quickly, most of the community advice officers went on furlough. The staff who remained working delivered shopping, medication, completed forms and also offered clients a bucket full of reassurance that we were still there to support them, albeit in a different way.

Slowly but surely all of the community advice officers returned to work, although for the time being assessments had to take place via telephone or online. This worked well because we could take the time to listen to the frustrations our clients were facing during the pandemic and still offer support in the short term until face to face appointments could resume. Our clients showed such resilience during these challenging times and were so appreciative of our support. It will be a time at SRSB and RSS that will never be forgotten. We missed the laughter in the corridors from clients interacting with each other, we missed the hustle and bustle in the reception area. We just couldn't wait to see everyone again. The pandemic just demonstrated to us how much we really appreciated our role in the community and how much our clients meant to us.

The time came for our team to re-group and the rules relaxed so we were able to visit people once more with extra safety Covid precautions in place. We just enjoyed being back in the community doing what we do best. We found people needed longer to talk and who wouldn't given what we had all been through?

Now here we are in 2023 and we hope the challenging times are behind us and the future is bright. The positivity of the community advice officers is something that we pass on to our clients each and every day. It fills us with pride when we see how our support has really impacted on a person's life in such a positive way.

**Sarah Keegan, Community Advice Officers Team Leader**

## Volunteering means a sense of achievement and pride

**B**etween September 2009 and February 2020, SRSB was a hive of activity, Monday to Friday. An army of volunteers in bright red tabards would stand and wait in reception to welcome the arrival of three minibuses full of eager and excited clients. Many haven't seen or talked to their friends, or even left the house since the previous week, so lots of catching up to do. Cups of tea, biscuits, and chatter fill the dining room, anticipation for what activity will fill the day. Bingo, raffles, shopping trips, garden centre, skittles, crafts, quiz, could all happen in one day, with an army in red tabards anything was possible.

Lunch would be the highlight, served by the army in red, delivered with military precision, before themselves sitting down to a hot two course meal, for many a relief from having to cook later that day.

Being a volunteer at both SRSB and the recently established RSS meant having the opportunity to visit lots of interesting places, get involved with exciting and prestigious events, find the courage to try many of the fundraising challenges, there was something happening seven days a week if you had the time, but there was never a shortage of willing helpers.

Every week new faces would appear in red tabards, medical students, work placements, university students, people from all walks of life, all ages, and all cultures, there to learn about dealing with sight loss and other health issues. There was never a dull moment, always plenty to do.

In March 2020 silence fell on SRSB

and RSS, no more red tabards, no mini buses arriving, isolation and loneliness befell many clients and volunteers alike. Activities, events, fundraising, field trips, theatre trips, tea, biscuits, lunch, socialising and seeing friends, all stopped.

Covid had pressed pause on many aspects but not all. SRSB and RSS found new ways of connecting people, the telephone and online became the main source of contact, groups were re-connected through conference calling, tele-befriending became the new lifeline for many and still is. Staff and a handful of volunteers kept the wheels turning until the day arrived when friends could once again meet up and hug one another.

During 2021, SRSB and RSS came back and were ready to take on the challenges of a new era, a range of new and exciting events are now being offered to our clients and volunteers to participate in. Our fundraising drive is now up and running, full sighted guide training is once again being offered to hopefully get our clients out and about again.

SRSB and RSS are once again becoming the hives of activity they once were, with many new and exciting opportunities for those who love to be a part of something that for 162 years has been at the centre of Sheffield's pride (and now a part of Rotherham too). Volunteering is a great way of meeting new people, trying new things, and feeling a great sense of achievement and pride.

**Andrea Stone,**  
**Befriending Service Coordinator**



## Chapter 9: Governance and Management

When it was set up the charity was run by a small self-appointed committee; the first known minutes are from a meeting on the 3rd January 1863, when it was resolved that the committee would meet weekly at 11am on Saturday mornings, that Westall Richardson should be chairman and a bank account opened. The acquisition of the premises on West Street was a key factor in establishing the institution on a permanent basis. The property was vested in trustees and rules for the running of the organisation were laid down in the trust deed. This was all approved by a general meeting of subscribers, held on 23rd December 1868, at which the rules of the institution were adapted and the trustees, officials and first committee of management under the new constitution were appointed. The trust deed, which was also the deed of conveyance for the property, was duly completed and dated

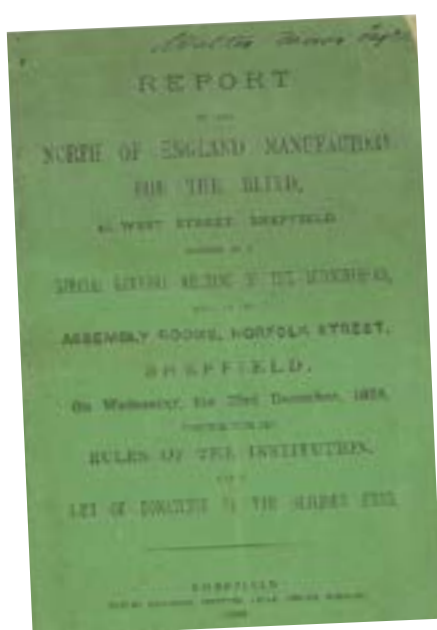
2nd February 1869. Over the years there were to be occasional amendments to the rules and they were rewritten in 1925 and 1983, but the framework created at this time established the way

the institution was governed until it was incorporated into a limited company in 1996, nearly 130 years later.

The rules set out that “every donor of £5 at one time, whether before or after the date of these presents, shall be a Life Governor of the Institution and every subscriber of £1 and upwards per annum, shall be a Governor of the Institution so long as such subscription is continued and every committee-man should be a Governor during his continuance in office”. The governors, in general meetings, would be responsible for electing committee members and trustees.

Lord Wharncliffe was elected president and one of the trustees, the Rev. William Mercer vice-president, William Carter honorary secretary, W. Corsan treasurer and these four comprised the management of the institution together with a standing committee of management comprising Eliza Harrison, five other women and four men including Westall Richardson; three of the ten were also trustees. They were responsible for the overall running of the manufactory and could undertake repairs of the property but needed the trustees to agree to any major alterations or additions to the buildings. The trustees included Eliza Harrison, three vicars and a collection of local businessmen and “gentlemen” and Daniel Doncaster was elected chair.

The general meetings included an update on the performance and activities and were a forum to amend the rules where appropriate. The annual meeting of subscribers in 1874 was held at the



*Photo of Report on the 23 December Meeting*



*Samuel Roberts*  
*President*  
*1899 -1926*

Cutlers' Hall on 14 October and the Sheffield Independent reported "a moderate attendance".

A year earlier the institution

had merged with the Sheffield Home Mission and it was noted that there were cases of

severe destitution amongst the poorer blind and that many could not afford clothes. It was agreed to amend the rules so that "the committee shall have power to apply such portion of the annual subscriptions to the society, not, however, exceeding one fourth of the subscriptions for the year, in aiding such sick and infirm blind persons resident in Sheffield, as the committee shall think fit". In 1898, this rule was rescinded and a new rule removed the one fourth restriction, but did add that aid should be for "such sick and infirm blind persons who have been resident not less than five years in Sheffield". In 1899, the objects of the institution were extended to enable the building of Overend Cottages.

At a special general meeting in January 1880, it was resolved that a ladies' visiting committee should be appointed to the newly opened school on Manchester Road and that the executive committee would be granted power to appoint honorary medical officers to attend the school. These comprised a physician, a surgeon and an ophthalmic surgeon and, later, a dentist. Thereafter committee members

had separate meetings to deal only with school matters, whilst continuing to cover the workshops and home mission in other regular meetings. In 1900, a new home mission committee was set up, also comprised entirely of ladies.

Although a lot of work was carried out by volunteers, the number of paid managers and staff continued to grow. After 16 years during which W.R. Carter carried out all the secretarial work, in 1883 a growing workload resulted in the appointment of a full-time assistant, J.B. Meeson. He joined the manufactory manager W. Senior, the shop manager Mrs Parkin and the home visitor Miss Harrison, as well as the teaching staff at the manufactory. At the Manchester Road school the superintendent William Wood was assisted by a matron and several teachers.

Eliza Harrison died in 1873, but several of her fellow committee members from 1868 were to continue with their involvement for many years. Four of them, W.R. Carter, John Wright, Joseph Gamble and Westall Richardson were still serving on the committee 25 years later. Of the original trustees, Daniel Doncaster, Joseph Gamble, James Barber and John Bingham were still acting in 1900. Lord Wharnccliffe had become an Earl in 1876 and continued in his role as president until his death in 1899. He was succeeded by Samuel Roberts, who had already been a vice-president for over ten years, succeeding his father who had died in 1887. In 1899/1900 he was Lord Mayor of Sheffield and elected MP for Ecclesall from 1902 until he stood down in 1923, by now a baronet. He remained president until his death in 1926. W.R.

Carter, had been appointed chairman of the committee in 1883, a position he was to hold for nearly 30 years and he sat on the committee until his death in 1922. He had qualified as a solicitor in 1859, but after five years went into business as a wholesale grocer. He had become a town councillor in 1882 and was elected an alderman in 1891. Blind workers from the manufactory attended his funeral and a wreath was presented from the children at the blind school on which was written: "From the blind for whom he did so much".

In 1894, under the provisions of the Technical Instruction Act 1889, the city council made a grant for the purchase of three pianos and tools and apparatus to help provide teaching in the construction and repairs of pianos and in the proper use of tuning. In return, they were given the right to make three appointments to the committee, but it seems only for the two years that the grants were paid. However, in 1903, when the Sheffield Education Authority took over responsibility for education from the old School Board, they required the right to appoint three members to sit on the school committee.

In 1908 the Education Authority gave an annual grant and contributed equipment and bursaries to enable leavers from Tapton Mount School to begin training in the institution's workshops. As a result, they were also able to nominate three representatives to the workshop committee. Two representatives from the home mission committee also joined the workshop committee from 1912 onwards.

Membership extended further in 1915 with two (later four) representatives from

the local Poor Law Guardians joining in respect of workshop matters after arrangements were made for them to fund the training of seven itinerant musicians in various occupations at the workshops. In 1920 two members of the school visiting committee were appointed for school issues and a member of the Sheffield branch of the National League of the Blind for workshop matters.

As the Institute began to receive funding from the council, following the Blind Persons Act 1920, two members of the council were appointed in respect of the workshop in 1922, being joined a year later by one representative each from the county borough of Rotherham and the West Riding County Council as the institute began supervising blind cases in those areas.

In 1925 new rules of the institution were drawn up, replacing those that had remained little changed since 1868. The qualifications for and the role of governors remained largely unchanged and they could attend the annual general meetings and special general meetings and could requisition special meetings if at least 50 of them signed a requisition. A list of names and addresses of governors was to be compiled and held at the institution's offices, available for the inspection of all subscribers. In 1926 there were 378 governors. The powers of the board management were set out in much greater



*W.R. Carter*

detail than in the 1868 rules and included “the admission, instruction, employment and removal of blind persons at the schools, workshops or other premises belonging to the institution, for the provision and administration of pensions and other forms of relief; and for the admission to and dismissal from homes belonging to or administered by the institution”.

The board of management was to consist of the president, vice-president, honorary treasurer, honorary secretary, 12 elected members and the trustees. The following representatives were eligible to attend meetings about the workshops and vote at them: four appointed by the city council, three by the Sheffield Education Committee, two each by the Sheffield and Ecclesall Boards of Guardians, one by the Sheffield Branch of the National League of the Blind, two by the home mission committee and one each by Rotherham County Borough and the West Riding County Council. Similarly for the school, Sheffield Education Committee had three representatives and the school visiting committee two. The following year a separate finance committee was set up, comprised of certain members of the board of management.

Within a year of the rules being revised, both the president Sir Samuel Roberts and the vice-president Edward Bedells, who himself had been a board member for over 27 years, had died. They were not to be replaced. Although the rules concerning representation on the board of management were not revised, for practical purposes they were short lived. After the council’s efforts to take control of the institution were rebuffed in

1927 and the institute ceased running the workshops and other services, the structure was simplified. The only external representative board members were three on the school from Sheffield Education Committee, whilst two members of the home mission committee sat in on non-school matters. The board elected three separate sub-committees: finance, home mission and house (school).

In the 1930s as plans were being developed a Cairn Home committee was set up under Maud Maxfield to oversee its building. She had first been elected to the committee of management in 1900 and was involved with the institution until her death 40 years later. She was a member of the home mission committee when it was created in 1901 and for many years its chair. She had been a member of the Sheffield School Board from 1894 and the Sheffield Education Committee when it was set up in 1903 and was one of its representatives on the committee overseeing the school. Her particular interest was in mentally and physically disabled and deaf and blind children. In 1922, the Maud Maxfield School for the Deaf was opened at East Hill House (it later moved to Ringinglow Road before closing in the early 1980s). Interestingly, nearby the Myope School was opened in 1923, in three ex-army huts, for partially sighted pupils.

The school on Manchester Road had been handed over to the Sheffield Education Authority in 1947. Shortly afterwards, six of the ladies who had been on the home mission committee, some for over 30 years, decided to retire and the remaining three became members of the

board of management, resulting in a much simpler structure.

In November 1948 Albert Harland, who had been chairman since 1929, reluctantly retired on account of increasing deafness. He was replaced by Robert Hargreaves, who had been a member of the board since 1928 and was to remain as chairman until his death in May 1968. Albert Harland was elected to be patron, a position that had been held continuously by the Earls Fitzwilliam from 1868 until the death of the eighth Earl in an air crash in May 1948. The position became vacant following Albert Harland's death in 1957 but in 1960, the institution's centenary year, Sir Peter Roberts was appointed president, a position last held by his grandfather in 1926 and one he was to hold until ill health forced his resignation in 1981.

In 1962 Miss E.M. Williams retired. She had joined the institution in 1929 and had been general secretary for 33 years, but day to day management of the organisation still involved certain members of the board. Even 20 years later, the then chairman Don Earl wrote in the annual report that "much of the routine business of the institution has been conducted by a small management team consisting of myself, our splendid treasurer and our administrator".

The rules were rewritten for the third time in 1983, but the overall framework remained largely unchanged. The qualification for becoming a governor was changed to include any person who had subscribed £10 or more in the preceding year or any nominee of any corporate body, firm or society which had subscribed £25 or more.

A more fundamental change took place just over a decade later. The Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind was incorporated on 4 May 1995, and the whole of the net assets of the Royal Sheffield Institution for the Blind were donated to it on 1 July 1996, at their market value. There was no longer any distinction between the trustees, in whom property vested and the board of management, who were responsible for day-to-day management. The trustees and directors, under the Companies Acts, were the same people and comprised the board. Of the board of management at 30 June 1995, all but one became a director in the new limited company, but only one of the trustees, Peter Lee CBE, who was to become chairman in 1998, a position he was to hold for 17 years until he stood down at the 2015 AGM.

In 2013 the Earl of Scarborough accepted the position of patron of the charity.

# Chapter 10: Raising funds and profile

In its first 20 years the charity had three major fund-raising efforts, beginning with the initial appeal to the public which raised £353 to open a manufactory “where the blind might be taught and employed in useful trades”. In 1867, a second appeal was launched to place the institute on a permanent basis by generating the funds to purchase the manufactory and adjoining premises on West Street. Over 350 donations were received, some from business but mainly from individuals and the target of £970 was achieved.

Ten years later the charity embarked on its largest exercise so far, to find the funds to enable it to build a new school for the blind. The Town Trustees, who held Daniel Holy’s Bequest, donated £500 and the Town Collector, head of the Town Trustees, Samuel Roberts personally gave £1,000. However, nearly 500 other individuals and organisations also contributed and collections were made in churches, with the result that nearly £15,000 was raised allowing the school to be built. It was opened, appropriately, by Samuel Roberts in September 1879, by which time he had been appointed a vice-president of the institution.

In 1879, as in every other year, the annual report listed all the contributors, subscribers and donors by name. It was a tradition that continued until 1979, after which less detailed reports were produced and reflected the importance of donations, subscriptions and legacies to the charity. Not only did the home mission and benevolent activities need funding,

but the manufactory, school and Cairn Home regularly required subsidising as well. Initially, individual subscriptions and donations were directed through volunteer collectors. The 1887 report lists 18 of them, all female, a Miss Brailsford raising the most with over £40. Over time more and more subscriptions were paid directly to the treasurer and the number of volunteer collectors reduced. In 1916, two paid collectors were appointed to canvass house to house and at works’ gates for donations. Ten years later there were four such collectors, some of whom were blind themselves, who raised £1,928 between them, the five volunteers remaining (including Miss Brailsford) managed £130.

The 1926 annual report detailed funds coming from other sources. Toc H raised £363 with a Scarlet Pimpernel Day, Mrs Sefton held a concert and garden fete, J.R. Ogden gave a lecture and events were staged by the Sheffield Amateur Operatic Society and the Sheffield Playgoers Society. Donations were received from Sheffield Teachers and the employees of Thos. W. Ward, D. Doncaster & Sons, The Underwood Motor Co. and The Sheffield Twist Drill Co.

Total income on the general charitable fund account in 1926 was £7,446, half of which came from national and local government grants and £2,980 from subscriptions, donations and collections. By the end of the following year, responsibility for the West Street workshops and other statutory obligations had been assumed by the council and a period of retrenchment began with

a reduced level of activities that was to continue through the war years and into the 1950s. The blind and other paid collectors ceased to be employed in those roles, although a few volunteers continued. Ten years later, total income on the general charity fund account was only £2,781, with just £130 in public grants and £609 raised from donations etc. Most of the income was generated by dividends and interest from investments and rent, mainly from the old West Street premises.

From the 1860s onwards legacies have played a crucial role in the development of the charity. In 1866, a legacy of £5 was received from the executors of Miss Ann Walker, late of Spring Lane.

**Legacies provided the capital base for the charity, enabling it to build a portfolio of investments which underpinned its financial position**

Legacies provided the capital base for the charity, enabling it to build a portfolio of investments which underpinned its financial position and generated income returns which helped support ongoing activities. From 1925 a separate account was maintained for legacies and by 1936 the amounts accumulated in that period alone accounted for more than half the value of the balance sheet and were, for the most part, represented by investments and building society deposits. In 1960, the institution's hundredth year, its assets totalled £129,500 and the accumulated legacies account stood at £81,900 - and that didn't include any legacies received before 1925.

Some legacies were applied for specific purposes. Rev. T. Mountain bequeathed

£100 which was used to buy stock-in-trade when the West Street properties were acquired in 1868. Mrs Overend's legacy of £2,000 received in 1897 funded the acquisition of land on Selborne Road and the subsequent building of the Overend Cottages. Although not a legacy as such, the gift from Mrs Murfitt in memory of her parents in 1934 spurred the building of Cairn Home. However, most legacies were made without specific provision and were for the general purposes of the charity. In 1976, when net assets totalled £235,000, the charity received notification of "what is believed to be the largest bequest ever made to the institution of approximately £60,000 by the late Miss M.C. Smith of Everton, near Gainsborough".

In 1981 legacies received totalled over £90,000. "This has enabled our Treasurer to increase the investments held by the institution and so to continue our policy of investing the value of all bequests where this is practical. In this way we shall slowly build up a reliable income. This will enable us to plan our activities and expansion further in advance without the continuing worry of the day-to-day financing of activities". Legacies have continued to play this essential role in the development of the society. In 2016, in part to help protect legacy income into the future, the society began offering a free wills service in conjunction with local solicitors.

There was always some confusion between the Sheffield charity and the present Royal National Institute of Blind People. In 1926 the National Institute for the Blind (as it was then named) had its own local branch and representative. Funds were raised for it at two concerts

by the Hallamshire Battalion of the Yorkshire and Lancashire Regiment at Weston Park and at an annual carnival at Hillsborough Park organised by the Sheffield Sportsmen's Committee. Negotiations were in hand during the year to try and reach agreement about the collection of voluntary funds in Sheffield. In 1951 it was claimed in the annual report, that "there is a prevailing impression in Sheffield that money subscribed to the National Institute for the Blind and proceeds from the various efforts which they make in this city all accrue for the benefit of the local blind of Sheffield. This is not the case... all

**In the decade following the Second World War the charity made a deficit every year. The sale of the school buildings to the council helped improve the financial position**

the monies they collect in Sheffield pass into their general funds which are administered on a national basis from London. No information can be obtained as to the amount of money they collect from Sheffield, but it is understood to be considerable." In 1954 Edward Kaulfuss was appointed as the charity's first public relations officer and "one of his functions will be to publish the facts and clarify the position with regard to charitable efforts for the blind in Sheffield, upon which there appears to be some confusion."

In the decade following the Second World War the charity made a deficit every year. The sale of the school buildings to the council helped improve the financial position and the appointment of Edward Kaulfuss was a recognition that if services

were to be extended significantly more funds needed to be raised. Edward Kaulfuss was himself blind, as was a volunteer, John Eagle, who had begun raising funds in local working men's clubs, raffling footballs signed by players from Sheffield United and Sheffield Wednesday and cricket bats signed by members of the Yorkshire team. Soon after his appointment, in 1954, Kaulfuss set up a team of helpers to produce Christmas crackers for distribution in shops, contacted local businesses whose employees contributed a penny a week and arranged collections at Owlerton and Bramall Lane. The impact wasn't only financial. "It is particularly gratifying and encouraging to find that the Sheffield public generally and industrial firms are becoming increasingly interested in the work this institution is doing for the local blind." In 1955 the institution set up house to house collections and was one of seven local charities to benefit from the Sheffield University Rag Day and in the financial year ending 31 March 1956, finally showed a surplus. The work of Edward Kaulfuss and John Eagle meant that by 1960 subscriptions, donations and collections totalled £7,340, six and a half times the £1,143 raised in 1953 before they began.

In July 1961 Edward Kaulfuss retired because of ill health and John Eagle took over as public relations officer. At both Cairn Home and the Overend Cottages at this time, expenditure exceeded income and they were underwritten by the general charitable funds, over half the income of which came from subscriptions, donations and collections.



In 1964 these were analysed as follows:

	£
Subscriptions and donations	974
Employees contributions, from over 100 local businesses	3,015
Collection boxes and Christmas crackers	619
Animal collecting boxes	384
House to house appeal	940
Hotels and clubs concerts and collections	1,395
Special events and collections	510
<b>Total : £7,837</b>	

In the early years of the 1960s the institution was generating surpluses, but by the middle of the decade these had once more turned to deficits and new income sources were needed if the organisation was to sustain higher levels of activity. In 1967/68 an annual grand draw and a spring draw were introduced, followed two years later by weekly bingo at Mappin Street and, in 1972, a weekly tote. The next year the treasurer spoke about the tote at the annual general meeting:

“Our predecessors of 112 years ago might not have altogether approved of this means of raising money for the blind, but the board felt that in present day circumstances a carefully conducted scheme of this nature was a perfectly proper way of collecting money for a charitable organisation and it had had the result that we have been able to increase the money spent during the year directly for the help of the blind to almost £17,000”. By 1974 this figure had increased to nearly £18,000 and over half of it came from the tote.

John Eagle resigned in 1975 to begin his own commercial enterprise having



*John and Jean Eagle*

raised over £100,000 in 15 years. His successor did not last long, but in 1977 Marcus Moore was appointed with special responsibility for fund raising.

The organisation was split into two divisions, welfare and fundraising, with Marcus Moore director of administration and fundraising and the former general secretary, Miss K. Page, director of welfare and able to devote her time to developing activities at Mappin Street.

At the same time a limited company was set up to run the Sheffield Blind Shop, dealing in second hand furniture and jumble, with profits to be covenanted to the institution. It operated from a shop and a warehouse in Cecil Square. Apart from sales to raise funds it also worked with the council and other charities to supply second hand furniture very cheaply to those in dire need. The tote and bingo continued although at lower level than before and second-hand book sales were introduced. The Mappin Street Singers were established, a choir which initially entertained at old age pensioner clubs throughout the city, but it soon became a staple fundraiser for the organisation.

As activities continued to grow and inflation began to bite costs increased. In 1980 expenditure on welfare increased by 24% and on general and administrative



*A concert at Mappin Street*

expenses by 21%. “In common with all charitable bodies with no fixed source of income we are having great difficulty in making ends meet.” Over 5,000 entries were received for a poetry competition run by the charity which benefitted from the proceeds of a book ‘Anthology 1980’ which

contained the winning entries. Outside sources helped. The Rotary Club of Hallam raised £5,000 for a resources room and two local trusts made grants towards the cost of rewiring Mappin Street. In 1983 a gift of £20,000 helped fund a computer centre.

After Cairn Home was handed back to

## Fundraising

Since our founding in 1860, fundraising appeals and gifts in wills have featured heavily in the charity’s history, allowing it to expand and develop to become the organisation we love today. Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic has placed increasing emphasis on approaches to trusts and other grant givers and also ensured that the charity focuses on the growing legacy market. The investment income we receive from legacies has always been an important part of our core funding and it is vital that it is maintained and developed to support our future work.

Our free wills service for clients continues and we have added an online platform as a different option. We have spent more time packaging up our work as projects for different approaches and

are currently raising appeal funds to help improve our Rotherham Sight and Sound offices. We’ve also received support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to help celebrate our delayed 160th anniversary. This includes establishing a small sensory and heritage garden in the Rose Garden at Graves Park, which will also include a Memory Poem Boulder written by our clients’ creative writing group and funded by the Covid-19 Community Memorial Fund. One of the nicest things about targeting grant givers is the need to review our work more regularly and receive feedback on the impact of our services. The heartfelt comments we receive from our clients make everything we do so much more worthwhile.

The charity’s approach to fundraising has always been to develop long term relationships with individuals, corporate

the institution in 1988, a refurbishment appeal was launched and numerous charitable trusts approached. The appeal raised £49,000 but total costs exceeded £600,000 and were mainly self-funded. Shortly afterwards, the Rotary Club of Sheffield Vulcan commissioned plans for the development of a fragrant garden at Cairn. Material costs were paid for by the institution, but many hours of labour were provided by Action for Employment and the garden was officially opened by the Lady Mayoress. The Friends of Cairn Home were established to help fund activities for residents and, over the time until they ceased in 2012, they raised tens of thousands of pounds for the benefit of residents.

In the mid-1990s the Blind Shop had

supporters and grant making trusts. It is registered with the Fundraising Regulator as a "Smaller Fundraising Charity". We comply with the rules and best practice guidance of the regulator and we have received no complaints regarding our fundraising.

We have a preference not to undertake any form of "cold call" fundraising with the public either by telephone or in person. All our fundraising activities derive from previous contact with the individual or through general advertising and promotion of fundraising events.

After 2005 community fundraising became far more of a focus. This included sponsored events, volunteer collections, collection tins, talks and providing fundraising support. We relied on client networks to spread the word. Whilst this still applies to an extent today, a fall in the numbers of clients

relocated to the old West Street premises which were still owned by the charity and sales increased immediately, but when the building was sold in 1999 the shop ceased operations.

In 2005, after a decade without the specific post, a fundraising and marketing manager was appointed once again, to develop income streams ahead of the planned new building for Mappin Street. A full calendar of fundraising events was developed, which also helped to raise the profile of the society. In both 2007 and 2008 it was a beneficiary of the Sheffield Half Marathon and in 2007 it was also nominated as one of the Master Cutler's charities. An appeal to equip the new Mappin Street centre had raised £89,000 by the time it opened in summer 2009.

visiting our centres due to the pandemic and the ongoing lack of traditional community fundraising activity, has meant this will have to change in the future.

We've had to rethink how we can fundraise more effectively and explore other opportunities such as online events. We also continue to look at new ways for digital giving and cashless donations. The imminent introduction of a new database will certainly help with relationship management and ensuring our supporters receive communications which demonstrate the impact of their donations and show how much they are valued. The challenge ahead is to continue to adapt our fundraising strategy to ensure that we are best placed to maximise income in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

**Steve Loane, Fundraising Manager**

## Getting our message out

**M**arketing our charity involves comprehensive research and planning to establish the current situation of relevant factors internally and externally, including amongst other things, medical advancements, client requirements, changes in society, technology, political matters, fundraising; and then how we reflect our organisation's overall strategy and values in promoting our services via many different channels.

In recent decades, our clients access information in many more and many different ways. Technology has been a huge and important change and

**In recent decades, our clients access information in many more and many different ways**

as it has advanced (and continues to advance), the result is that assistive equipment, programmes, platforms and apps are enhancing the lives of many people with sight and hearing loss in ways that could never have been imagined when our charity began in 1860.

Over the last ten years, marketing the charity has continued to reflect these advancements. The charity's website was updated in 2011 and is currently under review again to remain relevant for the development of our service provision. Websites are of course a necessary part of any organisation and SRSB, RSS and Cairn Home's website is built with accessibility in mind.

For example, it is important that the website includes accessible navigation for assistive technology, and that all images have image descriptions. We are now also working to incorporate more considerations for people with a hearing impairment.

Our social media channels were set up over ten years ago and we have a presence on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. We also have a blog called 'Blindlife Blog' which is a space for people with a vision impairment to share stories. Our social media pages have steadily grown in audience numbers and include clients, volunteers, staff and supporters, as well as other members of the general public. In the recent unprecedented years of varying Covid restrictions, our social media and the website became even more important and we upscaled our already daily updates during the periods when people couldn't go out. We used it to reassure people that we were still there, and tried to maintain an even, consistent tone that provided quality information to compliment the work that our teams were still doing, and be cheerful, but also considerate to what people were going through.

Communicating our charity's work to clients takes many forms, one of which is a quarterly Client Newsletter (Insight) which is sent out in print, or a variety of other formats including memory sticks, email mailshot and Braille. We have information about all services and

events on our website and share this information in various ways, producing large print information leaflets, mailshots, emails and also picking up the phone.

Our quarterly Supporter Newsletter communicates the work of our charity and our fundraising team to over 1000 local companies, community groups, individuals, trusts and volunteers. It features stories about the many ways that people in our communities support our charity and gives us the chance to thank them and for them to see the difference they make.

**Sharing knowledge within our communities is very important in raising awareness of issues that our clients face to pave the way for change, as well as delivering eye health messages to the wider public**

We produce press releases that are kindly supported by our local media and arrange radio and TV interviews. In recent years we have enjoyed showcasing collaborations such as an interview on a local TV show, BBC Look North, where we worked with other local organisations and featured clients discussing their experience of Tramlines music festival, having received donated tickets from Tickets for Good.

We feature regular advertising for our care home, Cairn Home in Crosspool, in local magazines and directories to ensure that local communities are

aware of this service.

Sharing knowledge within our communities is very important in raising awareness of issues that our clients face to pave the way for change, as well as delivering eye health messages to the wider public. Our teams offer presentations to other organisations, we attend networking meetings and visit local events. We facilitate work with universities for research projects, course projects and work experience, all with the aim of raising awareness of sight conditions and their challenges and also the abilities of our clients and breaking down barriers that might exist in society.

Our mission is to provide opportunity, support, friendship and services to blind and partially sighted people in Sheffield as well as blind, partially sighted and deaf people in Rotherham, helping them to achieve whatever they wish to do and whatever they aspire to be.

**Jane Peach, Marketing Manager.**

# Chapter 11: The charity and society

In 1860 Sheffield was a filthy place. Up to half a ton of soot fell on each house every year and until 1886 the sewage of the borough was discharged untreated into its rivers. In 1861 the Builder magazine recorded: 'these rivers, that should water Sheffield so pleasantly, are polluted with dirt, dust, dung and carrion; the embankments are ragged and ruined, here and there overhung with privies; and often the site of ash and offal heaps most desolate and sickening objects. No hope of health for people compelled to breathe so large an amount of putrefying refuse'. In 1874, in his 'Handbook for Travellers in Yorkshire', John Murray reported that

**The continuously built-up area quadrupled in the 30 years after 1850. Old systems of sanitation became overwhelmed**

'Sheffield, with the exception of Leeds, the largest and most important town in Yorkshire, is beyond question the blackest, dirtiest and least agreeable. It is indeed impossible to walk through the streets without suffering from the dense clouds of smoke constantly pouring from the great open furnaces in around the town.'

It reflected an industrial town that was growing rapidly, with the steel industry beginning to supplant cutlery making as the focus of the local economy. Between 1850 and 1873 Sheffield enjoyed an unprecedented period of unbroken prosperity. The population of 135,000 in 1851, grew to 185,000 in 1861 and 285,000 by 1881. In 'The Making of Sheffield' printed in 1924, J.H. Stainton

noted that between 1861 and 1879 it grew more quickly than any other provincial town in the country. The continuously built-up area quadrupled in the 30 years after 1850. Old systems of sanitation became overwhelmed and poverty and recurring epidemics created severe risks to public health.

Sheffield had become a municipal borough in 1843 and elected its first borough council on November 1 that year. However, for the first 20 years of its existence, the functions the council performed were few; in 1863, three quarters of its budget of under £17,000 was spent on the police force. In 1864 with the introduction of the Local Government Act, the powers of the council were greatly extended to embrace not only the police force, but also the fire brigade, the highways, drainage and sanitation, buildings and civic amenities, although its attempts to take over the local water and gas companies were met with considerable resistance. However, it did not appoint its first Health Officer until forced to do so by the 1872 Public Health Act and much of his early work was focussed on measures to deal with street cleaning, housing and privy middens.

Against this background when the blind institution opened on West Street in September 1860 the local area provided its own hazards. On November 8 1862, a letter appeared in the Sheffield Telegraph: "Dear Sir, —I am persuaded that the kind feelings entertained towards the blind in general, and the interest manifested for our institution in West-street, will constrain

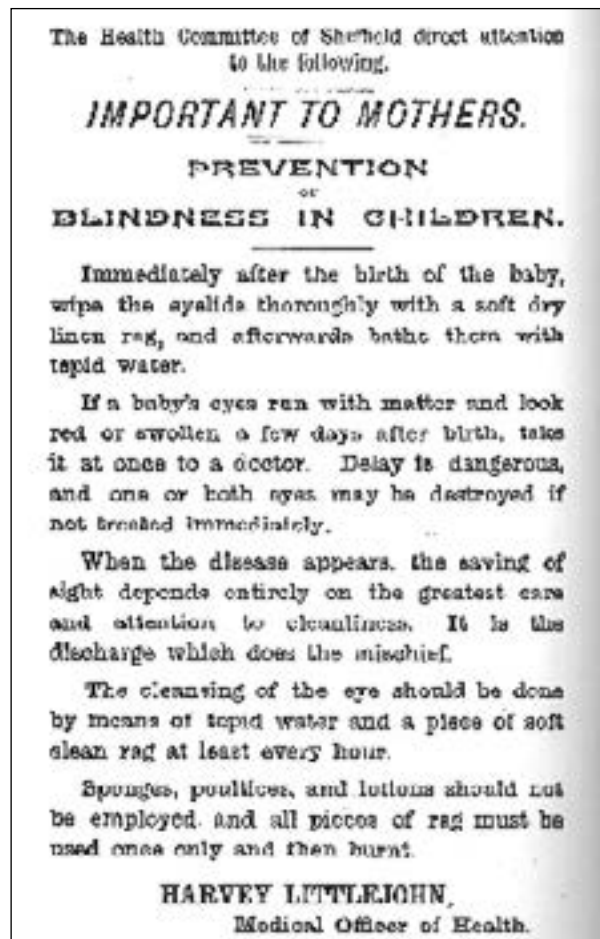
your readers to endeavour to remove a danger to which the blind are especially exposed, and which has just caused the death of one of our best workmen. As J. Ingham was lately coming to his work at the manufactory, he fell into a cellar in Westbar-green, which was left open. He was much injured, and though every attention was paid to him, he died in the sick ward of the Sheffield Workhouse on Wednesday last. Although this is the only death which has arisen out of such dangerous openings in the crowded streets, yet 11 times other blind men have fallen and suffered from similar causes within the last six months.

Yours faithfully, J. F. WITTY, Incumbent of St. Matthew's. November 7th ."

Overcrowding, poor sanitisation and poverty bred disease. In 1860 life expectancy in the UK was under 42 and in 1890 just under 46. As today, many people lost their sight later in life. The Royal Commission in their 1889 Report on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb calculated that the average age of blind people was 49 (higher than average life expectancy at that time) and the average age of onset of blindness was 31. For many this could mean the end of their working life, although in the 1883 annual report it was recorded that 'through the kind interest of a lady at Kings Langley, Herts, a shoemaker who had recently lost his sight was sent to the school to become acquainted with the special tools used by the pupils. In a few weeks he returned ready to resume his old occupation.'

Where sight loss arose in the young in many cases it could have been avoided. From 1894 onwards the annual report

included a message from the Sheffield Health Committee which it was hoped would help reduce blindness in infants, which often developed from ophthalmia, conjunctivitis of the new-born:



In July 1908 'The Blind' magazine noted that Mr Snell, who was the honourable ophthalmic surgeon at the Sheffield blind school "invited the midwives of Sheffield to meet him at the Royal Infirmary and impressed upon them the importance of attention to the eyes of infants soon after birth. He told them that out of 333 inmates received into the school since its opening, no less than 136, or more than 40 percent, had been there as a consequence of disease occurring during the first few days of infancy and he endeavoured to enlist the help of the midwives in preventing the

disease of purulent ophthalmia". As early as 1881, Dr Carl Crede had established a treatment using drops with silver nitrate that was eventually to lead to the virtual elimination of this disease in the western world, although it took many years for the knowledge to spread and it wasn't until 1939 that the annual report recorded that this cause of blindness was 'rapidly disappearing'.

By 1959 average life expectancy at birth had risen to 59 and with increasing numbers of older people there were changes in patterns of eye disease and blindness. In the 1950s most blindness was caused by cataract, whilst

**SRSB continues to exhibit at health shows and at schools, in part to promote good eye health to reduce the incidence of sight loss in the future**

improvements in the treatment of diabetes meant those with the condition lived longer with many of them becoming blind because of diabetes. Today eye disease from these causes is generally treatable but, as people live longer, other age-related eye diseases such as macular degeneration and glaucoma have become more prevalent.

SRSB continues to exhibit at health shows and at schools, in part to promote good eye health to reduce the incidence of sight loss in the future. In addition, it delivers visual impairment awareness training to staff, volunteers and outside bodies to provide an introduction to the needs of visually impaired people. Support Groups, such as for Charles Bonnet Syndrome, Retinitis Pigmentosa or Macular Degeneration, meet on a regular

basis to share experiences and information relative to their specific circumstances.

In 1889 The Royal Commission noted that 'the state does nothing for the aged and infirm blind, except through the guardians to offer them the workhouse without any special provision for them to alleviate their lot, or to distinguish them from the general mass of paupers reduced by their own vice or folly.' At that time, without government or local authority support, The Sheffield Institution for the Blind was very much a local initiative supported and financed by the local community and run by local people.

The Education Act of 1870 led to the creation of local school boards and, without making specific reference to blind children, required that all children resident in each school district should be educated. From this time on there was a growing recognition that blind children needed educational and welfare provision that was more certain than that provided by unassisted local charities. Following the Royal Commission, which had been appointed in 1885, the Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act 1893 made the education of all blind or deaf children, other than those resident in workhouses, the responsibility of the school authorities. The school on Manchester Road was duly certified for this purpose. Following the 1902 Education Act, the school boards were abolished and their responsibilities taken over by local education authorities, which in Sheffield demanded three seats on the blind school management board.

From about 1900 onwards there were movements for the introduction of state aid for blind people and between 1905



and 1912 there were attempts to bring bills before parliament. Both the National League of the Blind, representing many workshop employees and the National Employment Committee for the Employment of the Blind, representing the employers, agreed that state aid was essential but differed in their views as to what it should comprise and how it should be administered. Agreement was eventually reached, but the First World War intervened before any legislation was enacted.

After the war, and following further agitation from the National League of the Blind, including the 1920 blind march, the Blind Persons Act was passed in 1920. It reduced the pension age for blind men from 70 to 50, regulated charities in the sector and required local authorities to 'promote the welfare of blind persons',

**The charity has always worked in and with its local communities and a priority has been raising awareness of issues affecting those with vision impairments**

which they often did by making the fullest use of existing voluntary societies for blind people, contributing where necessary, to the cost of their services. The act, instead of seeking to replace voluntary effort, aimed to bring the voluntary agencies under the partial supervision of the state, via local authorities, with additional funding where appropriate.

Initially, this is what happened in Sheffield and the activities of the charity grew considerably. However, its management was under regular attacks from the local labour party and when that party gained control of the council in 1926, it soon

moved to take on the responsibilities prescribed under the 1920 Act, although the charity still retained control of the school on Manchester Road and the Overend Cottages.

A second Blind Persons Act was introduced in 1938 and reduced the age of eligibility for a pension for blind men from 50 to 40. Thereafter legislation sought to embrace all rather than specific classes of disability. The Education Act, 1944 further extended the obligations and powers of local authorities and soon led to the school being transferred to the council. The National Assistance Act, 1948 replaced the old poor law system and many of the provisions of the two Blind Persons Acts and in the same year the NHS was created.

Over time, the growing influence of national and local government in social matters resulted in their taking on activities previously operated by the charity, including the workshops, many of the home visits and the school. For 21 years from 1968 the council also took over the running of Cairn Home, before it was closed and then refurbished and reopened by the charity. Benefits paid by government improved over time, but as late as 1977, the charity was making grants to help fund clothing, electricity and shoe repairs, and was distributing sheets and blankets.

The charity has always worked in and with its local communities and a priority has been raising awareness of issues affecting those with vision impairments supporting, campaigning and innovating to make a difference for people of all ages living with sight loss. With the intention of providing clients with the most

suitable support delivered in an efficient manner, relationships today include with government departments, local authorities, national and local charities, businesses, universities, hospitals and support groups. The charity works with local universities on projects including research, fundraising and promoting awareness and joins with other disability organisations on accessibility issues, with diverse community groups and with local and national media.

Over the years the great majority of funding has come from the donations, gifts and bequests of local people and organisations. Local volunteers have been essential to all aspects of the organisation's operations.

When the national charity, Royal National Institution for the Blind, was set up on 16 October 1868, it was called the British and Foreign Society for Improving the Embossed Literature for the Blind.

In 'The Blind of London' E.C. Johnson wrote in 1860 'Blind men of all ages and from all walks of life are shut out from the ordinary pursuits and excitements of daily life. Their industry is crippled by competition with the seeing; their literature is limited from the very nature of tangible typography and by the paucity of books, while their ordinary tone of thought is fettered by the unconquerable feeling of dependence which besets them at every turn and drives them back to sad consciousness of their affliction whenever they attempt to go it alone'.

Helping blind people to read was an important role for the organisation from its earliest days.

In this they were greatly assisted by Sir Charles Lowther, blind himself from infancy after an attack of scarlet fever, who supplied the blind institutions across Yorkshire with libraries in the embossed Moon print. In 1869 he provided the Sheffield Home Mission with about 200 volumes of bibles and religious and popular books, one proviso being that they were available for reading at home. Teaching to read in Moon and Braille was not restricted to the school and was also carried out by the home visitor. By the mid 1880s over 1,000 books were being loaned from the library each year. From the 1950s onwards talking book machines were acquired for lending out to clients.

**Over the years the great majority of its funding has come from the donations, gifts and bequests of local people and organisations**

Six machines were procured in 1958 but 'are rather costly to purchase'; however, by 1985 there were 445 talking books in use in Sheffield. Today, SRSB and RSS still advise on the various audio book services available

Improvements in technology were embraced where practicable. In 1931 nine Crystal sets were received from the British Wireless for the Blind Fund and the next year a wireless was purchased for use at some of the social evenings. From 1954, with the help of the Sheffield Hospitals Sports Commentaries Society, local football match commentaries were relayed to Mappin Street and Cairn Home, where, following the extensions completed in 1959, wireless sets were installed in the lounges and all the bedrooms.

SRSB is still the local agent for the British Wireless for the Blind Fund with radio and CD players available on loan to blind and partially sighted people.

In 1979 a resources room was established, making use of closed-circuit television to greatly magnify words, letters, or objects. Other machines helped duplicate Braille or produce tactile maps and diagrams. The resources room also supplied smaller popular items for use

**In recent years technology has revolutionised accessibility to information and help for those with sight and hearing loss, helping them to maintain their independence**

by clients, whilst demonstrations were arranged for other items which could be ordered separately. When the Mappin Street site was reopened in its new building in 2010, a new equipment centre was set up to provide an improved service with a wider product range. In addition, the post of technology officer was created to provide advice on computers, mobile phones, tablets and GPS navigation devices. Companies providing equipment to help visually impaired people began to hold demonstration days.

In recent years technology has

revolutionised accessibility to information and help for those with sight and hearing loss, helping them to maintain their independence. Smart phones, tablets and other items of equipment include many features as standard with access to a wide range of apps and packages that provide assistance with navigation, reading, communication and a range of other daily activities.

When the charity was established, the prevailing ideologies were of the values of deference, respect, thrift, prudence, sobriety, independence, the importance of religion and the promotion of self-help. Both the workshops and the school aimed to produce independent and self-supporting individuals and education and instruction was regarded as the best way of achieving this. This benevolent paternalism was not always welcomed by those it was meant to help, some of whom resented relying upon charity or felt exploited.

As government took on many of the roles previously conducted by voluntary organisations, so the focus for the charity changed but it continues to be the primary source of services and support for people with sight loss in Sheffield and sight and/or hearing loss in Rotherham.



## Sources and Bibliography

A significant number of records have been retained at SRSB on Mappin Street, including minutes dating back to 1863, old plans, deeds and legal records, letters, school diaries and photographs. Most useful have been the annual reports produced when the charity was a trust and which date back to 1877 and which each devote several pages to reviewing events of the previous twelve months. Several of the older photographs in this book also came from the annual reports. The annual reports and financial statements after incorporation in 1995 can be seen online at Companies House.

On occasions, such as when Sheffield Council took over the running of the workshops in 1927 and the school twenty years later, legal counsel was sought and the submissions included detailed summaries of the setting up and development of the charity. There are occasional handwritten notes on points of history, some written over a hundred years ago. More recently, presumably in the 1980s, Mrs. D. Tooze, the wife of a one-time headmaster, produced a typewritten piece entitled "A short study of the way in which the changing ethos of the Tupton Mount School Community has been reflected in the use of space and buildings during the first century of its existence".

In 1960, a centenary souvenir brochure was produced and, to commemorate the 160th anniversary, Jane Peach created a more comprehensive brochure with an abundance of photographs: "Our History in Sheffield 1860 – 2020".

There is also a collection of old books, including: **Blind People: Their Works and Ways**, by Rev. B.G. Johns, 1867.

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