

History: Where It All Began

George La Touche was a Guernseyman working as a tomato grower in the Channel Islands, when he first experienced the symptoms of Ménière's, with which he was eventually diagnosed. No-one in his family had the understanding or patience to help him with his symptoms and so he joined the local Deaf Club where he felt isolated from the other members who were all totally deafened and used sign language to communicate. He found penfriends in the UK through the British Association of Hard of Hearing (now Hearing Link) and eventually attended an annual meeting in the UK where he met Marie, whom he eventually married.



Marie Nobbs MBE
(1922-2016)
Founder

Marie was very involved with voluntary work for the British Association of Hard of Hearing, but this was her first experience of supporting someone with Ménière's and she sometimes found it hard. After his death in 1976, Marie continued her work in the hard of hearing community, and through her international commitments she met people who had set up a telephone self-help network for Ménière's sufferers in Holland; she realised how useful this would have been to herself and George.

With support and encouragement from colleagues a limited advertising campaign was undertaken, which attracted the attention of the television producers of the programme "SEE HEAR". Marie appeared on the programme in early 1984 to talk about plans to establish a support group. There was an immediate response and in two weeks over 80 letters expressing interest were received.

During the early days colleagues, friends and family came forward with offers of help. As is still the case, enquirers were delighted to know of others to contact to share their problems. A regular newsletter was established with interesting articles on Ménière's and discussions, alongside information on the progress of the group.

Marie had been advised from the beginning that medical backing was crucial to the success of the support group. Eddie Trinder, a past Chairman of Hearing Concern, arranged for Marie to meet with the late Dr Margaret Dix, MD, FRCS, who gave support and encouragement, not least by answering members' questions and providing useful information on medical aspects, exercises and diet. Author of some 72 papers and won awards both in the UK and internationally. she was highly respected for her work, which covered a wide range of aspects of hearing and balance; especially in relation to the central nervous system. When Dr Dix became too ill to continue, Mr Andrew Morrison FRCS, one of the UK's leading specialists in Ménière's, offered to form a Medical Advisory Committee, comprising eminent surgeons and physicians. Jonathan Hazell, FRCS, also provided information and support.

Within a year it was obvious more people were needed to help and advise on progress for the future of the support group. In 1985 Marie convened a panel of interested people and in 1986 a smaller Working Party was set up to advance plans to form a Constituted Society. Their work bore fruit and in June 1987 the Charity Commission approved in outline a possible Constitution for the Society. The first general meeting was held in London in July 1987. Major decisions were taken, Officers and an Executive Committee were elected, and the Ménière's Society was formed and, shortly afterwards the Society was officially registered as a charity.

