

Guidelines for Vinten Ambassadors

What is a Vinten Ambassador?

A Vinten Ambassador is appointed by the trustees of the William & Ellen Vinten Trust following a recommendation by the staff member who is the STEM contact for the school. The ambassador should ideally be a Year 12 student who is studying at least 2 STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) at A-level. He/she should also show an aptitude and interest in Engineering as a possible university course of study and/or as a career. The appointed student should be aware of the aims of the Vinten Trust to promote these within the school at suitable opportunities during the academic year.

What are the aims of the William & Ellen Vinten Trust?

The William and Ellen Vinten Trust has several aims, but its principal activity is to pursue initiatives which increase the interest of school and college students in the Bury St Edmunds area in science and technology subjects. The goal is to increase the numbers of students who might consider careers in the engineering disciplines and to improve their levels of attainment.

The trust currently offers the following support:

- Financial assistance towards capital projects in primary, middle and upper schools and West Suffolk College, which are specifically aimed at improving the quality and quantity of teaching/training in STEM subjects. These can involve building extensions or modifications, refurbishments and/or the provision of new equipment. Trustees usually look to help with partnership funding for these projects from the school and/or other partners.
- Help to individual students wishing to access courses, competitions and other activities, which are aimed at providing excellence in STEM related areas.
- The appointment of Vinten ambassadors, Year 12 students in local senior schools, who assist the promotion of the aims of the trust in their schools and who, in return, gain from a direct link with the trust and its two historically linked companies, Vitec Production Solutions and Thales.
- Bursary grants to students embarking on and sustaining study in university courses in Engineering. These Bursaries are given to one student per year leaving each of the senior schools and the grant continues for the duration of the course.
- 100% funding of the costs of running a STEM DAY for year 9 students in each of the five senior schools.
- The provision, with the assistance of the national Smallpeice Trust, of a bi-annual residential Engineering Experience course for up to 50 Years 9 and 10 students.
- After the Engineering Experience, we will 50% fund the cost of Smallpeice residential event or equivalent, for individual students.
- Support to engineering companies who take on apprentices via West Suffolk College or West Suffolk Training.
- Support STEM events in primary schools working with their school's outreach teams.

Background to the W&E Vinten Trust

William Vinten, always known as Bill, was a skilled precision engineer born in 1880. At the age of 13 he set up a private firm for repairing friends' bicycles at sixpence a time. During a 3-year apprenticeship period he worked for a number of companies including Frederick Lamplough who was building his 1896 steam car which introduced him to the rapidly expanding automotive industry. In 1897 he joined Vickers Armament Factory in Erith, Kent to work on the precision manufacture of breech blocks for heavy guns. He learnt to produce components to such close tolerances that they would fit together perfectly when assembled and be completely interchangeable when spare parts were needed. His reputation as a precision machinist grew as he worked for several companies and occasionally freelanced until one day, he saw an advertisement asking for sets of steel punches and dies to be made to very fine limits. It was placed by Charles Urban, an American working in Soho, London, in the early days of the film industry. Urban was so impressed by the punches Bill Vinten produced that in 1908 he offered him the job in charge of his engineering workshop. In 1909 Urban proposed that Vinten should run the workshop on his own. This was made possible by a loan of £600 from his mother which he repaid within 2 years. On 1 Jan 1910 the company 'W Vinten – Gear Cutting, Engraving, Small Accurate Die and Press Tool Maker' was started with its first order from Charles Urban for "25 Kinemacolor Machines (heavy type)" at a price of £25 each.



During the First World War Vinten was to build the first cine cameras for use by the newly formed Royal Flying Corps. By 1928 the company had grown to such an extent that they moved to new premises in Cricklewood, N London. In the 1930s Vinten developed cameras for use in the film industry and then in 1936 they supplied equipment for the first public television transmission from Alexandra Palace, London. During the 1940s the company was heavily involved with supplying cameras and other equipment to the RAF for the vital aerial reconnaissance during the Second World War. From these early days the company has expanded, taken over or merged with other companies, moved again in 1964 from London to Bury St Edmunds and today is now part of the international company Vitec Group. In 1988 the defence business separated and today is part of Thales, continuing its tradition of developing & supplying airborne surveillance and protection systems around the world.

Throughout those early days Bill Vinten was supported by his wife Ellen. They married on Christmas day 1905. They had 5 children 4 of whom worked for the company at one time. The 2 sons, Charles and Bill (aka Paddy) were both engineers. Charles took over running the business when his father died and concentrated on the camera side of the business. Bill started his career as a cameraman and joined the company much later concentrating on the television products that were needed both in the TV studios around the world but also for use in outside broadcasts. Two of the 3 daughters, Maisie and Phyllis worked for the company, but Jean never did since her career centred on dressmaking. She never lost her interest in following the developments of the business and was involved, together with her siblings, whilst it remained a family run private firm. Eventually in 1972 it was floated on the London stock exchange and Jean was able to realise her shares. It was from some of those shares that she was able to provide the funds needed to start the W&E Vinten Trust in memory of her parents. When the youngest son, Bill died in 2017 he bequeathed some more shares to add to the Trust's capital.

William Vinten died in 1937 aged 57. Ellen was born in 1882 and died in 1947 aged 65.

Where to go for more information

- The William & Ellen Vinten Trust web site – www.vintentrust.org.uk
- Brief history of the Vinten Company - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vinten#Vinten_Family

- More history - www.vitecgroup.com/about-us/our-history/
- A book entitled '**Images of Success – The History of Vintens 1910 – 1992**' by Stuart Sansom and Luke Vinten is now out of print but it may be possible to find a copy via a local library. Occasionally copies appear for sale on the internet. This is a comprehensive work detailing the equipment that Vintens developed and manufactured and many of the people that were employed by the company during those years.