

# ***PRESS INFORMATION FROM:*** **Westhoughton Local History Group**

29th January 2018

## **Leading local heritage society reflects on its most successful year to date, and launches major new research/exhibition project for 2018**

Founded in 2005, *Westhoughton Local History Group* has grown inexorably to become one of the largest and most innovative heritage organisations in the region, and now regularly attracts between 70 and 80 attendees to its twice-monthly meetings.

At the inaugural meeting of 2018, members were given an illustrated retrospective of the manifold activities of the previous 12 months, a year which could arguably be described as the busiest and most successful in the group's history, with no less than 30 'gatherings' of diverse types, comprising presentations on an eclectic range of topics by in-house and guest speakers, walks, quizzes, and 11 well-supported trips and excursions to places of historical interest.

Without doubt, the highlight of the year was the group's hugely-successful 'Aspects of Howfen' exhibition, which ran for six weeks in September/October, and coincided with the official launch of the long-planned 'Westhoughton Timeline' which now adorns the walls of the library. This project was the brainchild of Pam Clarke, founder-member and president of the group, but sadly she didn't live to see its implementation, and hence it is most fitting that a panel within the display dedicates the Timeline to her memory.

The group's publishing team also had its busiest year ever, producing two superbly-illustrated booklets linked to the Timeline project, one being an expanded version of the wall-mounted displays, and the other featuring 37 evocative watercolours of the Westhoughton of yesteryear by the group's own in-house water-colour artist, Tom Newton MBE, the originals of which formed part of the autumn exhibition.

Both publications rapidly sold out, as did prints of the original water-colour images, and likewise the sixth in the series of another Tom Newton initiative, bespoke Christmas cards for the group under the banner of '*Westhoughton Christmases of Yesteryear.*'

Another initiative from the publishing team was the inaugural issue of a planned series of articles profiling prominent personalities of Westhoughton past and present, entitled '*Keawyed Characters*'. Fittingly, Tom Newton was chosen as the first 'in the spotlight', as he is one of Westhoughton's best-loved citizens, and active in a number of the town's organisations, as well as having made an incomparable contribution to the history group over many years.

### **A MAJOR PROJECT FOR 2018**

But not content to rest on its laurels, WLHG has launched an ambitious new research and exhibition project for 2018, the catalyst for which is the forthcoming Armistice centenary commemorations in November, marking the end of World War I.

Back in 2014, the group staged a most impressive major exhibition linked to the commencement of the conflict, with the most tangible legacy of this being Pam Clarke's epic book '*Westhoughton and the Great War*'.

Although, this time around, the group will again pay due homage to the men of Westhoughton who made the ultimate sacrifice, the focus will be expanded somewhat, in a planned exhibition entitled '*Westhoughton in the Wake of World War I*'.

The heritage group's plan is to research those Westhoughton men and women who played a part in the Great War, but *survived*, and went on to play a role in the life of the town in subsequent years. Whilst earlier intensive research yielded substantial information about the vast majority of those killed, little is recorded about the survivors, so the history group is appealing for any information in this regard.

The group's research team is also attempting to build up a portrait of life in Westhoughton in the immediate post-war years, through the hardships and deprivation of the 1920s, up to the General Strike of 1926.

The focus is now on that eight-year period following the 1918 Armistice, with researches into Westhoughton's industrial, commercial, religious, educational, sporting, social and cultural activities now under way.

Any reader able to contribute anything with regard to family members involved in any aspect of the Great War, or having any information about life in Westhoughton during the period being researched, can contact the group's exhibition coordinator, Garth Ratcliffe, on 01204 305035, or email: [garth.ratcliffe@sky.com](mailto:garth.ratcliffe@sky.com)

The planned exhibition will launch at Westhoughton library on Saturday, 10 November, and run for several weeks.

Members will be kept updated on the project's progress throughout the year by means of another new publishing venture, '*The Howfen Herald*', a periodic newsletter, the first issue of which appeared earlier this month.

Westhoughton Local History Group meets on the first and third Thursdays of each month, on the upper level of the library, from 10-00am to noon.

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