

Nomination for Westhoughton Town Council Civic Award 2019

~ Wilf Dillon ~

To know Wilf Dillon is to know someone kind, infectious and generous in spirit and deed.

First getting to know Wilf at a community event, he was manning the W.A.S.P. stall at Howfenfest in 2009, selling knitted toys, jams and cakes raising funds for this 'Westhoughton Age Support Project'. Wilf one of several go-getting characters - including the late Len Maycroft and Jean Green (both lost this year) - always smiling and with time for a chat and some warm banter.



His involvement with W.A.S.P. goes back to 1982 when it was formed out of a group dedicated to fundraising for the Winifred Kettle House – Wilf then in charge of catering at Booth's.

Over the years getting to know what W.A.S.P. was and how this gentleman with such a zest for life was such a driving force and champion of this family of seniors... How he as Treasurer and



Events Organiser did so much to fundraise for the group in a variety of ways, as well as to plan and put together the many trips and social events that get these OAPs out of their homes and into a community of friends – “we are doing something about the isolation people face as they get older...”, he'd say.

The get-togethers, which are always something to look forward to, whether bingo and a natter at the John Holt Centre on a Monday afternoon or the Winifred Kettle on a Thursday evening; or the multiple day-trips to the seaside hotels on the coach for a hearty meal and entertainment; or the W.A.S.P. Christmas Party at Brookfield Hall where he will go out of his way to make sure as many non-WASPies from the local senior community are invited...

To achieve all this time must be devoted to fundraising by putting together bids for grants to sustain and pay for these activities – the jewel in the crown being not one but two successful applications to the Co-op to be chosen as the year's 'Local Causes' recipient – W.A.S.P.'s popularity with Co-op customers confirmed as it received a cheque for £8,588 in 2019. In January 2015 it was Wilf's pitch at the Greater Manchester Police's 'Westhoughton You Decide' event that got them the votes and £1,500 to support W.A.S.P. activities that year.



When you get to know Wilf a little more you find out that his has been such a rich life: one of challenges met, the odd set-back, achievement, excellence in his work, resilience and respect from those

whose lives he has touched. His amazing story told recently in a Westhoughton Local History Group 'Keawyed Characters' folio.

As well as W.A.S.P., there is his involvement with Westhoughton Visiting Service (now Senior Solutions), where he would visit those older, isolated people he so cares about. This has led to an interesting and productive intergenerational tie-up with students from Westhoughton High School where he would go in and do talks; reciprocating, pupils would spend time with our senior citizens and have treated them as family with letters and presents at Christmas... Wilf's candid and moving 'Letter to Self at age 15' as part of the Imperial War Museum North Military Veterans 'Serving Stories' project used to give young people some perspective and connection with a life they could not imagine. Of course, these *Citizens of Tomorrow* would take Wilf Dillon to their hearts – a shining light and inspirational figure. The School gives now out an award each year to leavers in his name.



A man of faith, some 50 years dedicated to Sacred Heart RC Church in Westhoughton as a key parishioner, fundraiser (his mammoth sponsored walk in 1970 raised the £1,200 needed to purchase the land adjacent to the 'old' church upon which the current church now stands), a 'Knight of St. Columba', and during this time Scout Leader, and organiser of pilgrimages to Lourdes, as well as taking on Mass duties in church and in the community. His service was recognised by his Church with the award in 1983 of a *Benemerenti Medal* (one of the highest awards given to Lay People by the Roman Catholic Church).

His life's service to the nation, his church and his community recognised when his name appeared in the Queen's Birthday Honours (2012) for Her Diamond Jubilee celebrations, Wilf Dillon awarded the *British Empire Medal (BEM)* 'For services to Elderly People in Westhoughton, Lancashire'.



Since its inception Wilf has been part of Westhoughton Community Network, his presence always warmly met at meetings and events – his enthusiasm for W.A.S.P. shining through, so proud at what this amazing group of self-sufficient seniors do. He is more than happy to support community events, such as the Local History Group's exhibition marking the end of World War One in 2018 – all the more remarkable as he not long

since had a major stroke. His resilience and recovery admirable. A major heart bypass operation in his 90s didn't stop him either!

Wilf Dillon is a man who is much appreciated and loved right across the community, recognition locally at a civic level is well deserved and would be something this amazing 97-year-old will - coming from his community – greatly appreciate.

