

# 'The Book of Quint' event at The Robert Shaw (Wetherspoon's) Westhoughton - Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023

By Chris Buckley (Westhoughton Community Network) 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023

## Part One – The Meet-up Event

Late May a message was received regarding a new book, a 'Jaws Obsession' fan event and the Westhoughton/Robert Shaw connection. In the few intervening weeks of communications, planning and preparation, we hoped and we looked forward. In short order the day arrived, Westhoughton was to hold a very special cultural event celebrating Westhoughton's famous son, actor and writer, and in particular his most famous role and introducing a new chapter in his legacy.



You don't always know what to expect with these events, you hope that people turn up and that the event goes well; if outdoors that the weather is kind! Pieces need to fall into place.

Arriving early at eponymously named Wetherspoon's, 'The Robert Shaw', I was greeted by the sight of a large inflatable jaws (inspired) and staff blowing up a sea of blue balloons; managers Adam, Julie and the staff had been great, really helpful and going out of their way to facilitate this left-field event. Already there, the author himself, Ryan Dacko with his wife, Tatiana, who had flown all the way from New York via Chicago, Frankfurt, Manchester and a long taxi ride, just to be here for this event – some commitment! Ryan, a lineman by trade who fixes and installs electric cables, had been inspired by a tour of the Jaws lot at Universal Studios and a visit to Martha's Vineyard where Jaws was filmed to delve into the story we know and imagine the story we don't. Doing so in a series of 'JawsOB' podcasts, the natural progression was to develop Robert Shaw's Quint's backstory, with Ryan writing a forensically adept 400-page historical fiction novel, namely 'The Book of Quint', its aim to add depth and colour to the single-minded curmudgeon character created by Shaw, tracking his life from the sinking of the USS Indianapolis to his moving to Amity island and him becoming the shark hunter. More a human story than a monster story. Eventually there was a nod of approval from the Benchley estate, and now interest from publishers and the movie studios.



In a suitcase a pile of hardback books – just 300 had been printed, paid for by a crowd-sourced fan initiative - black cover with the distinctive bow image of Quint, harpoon in hand; a postcard memento with an AI generated image of Quint as a younger sailor, and other fan trinkets such as badges and stickers.

We were joined by Haydn Wheeler, with partner Sheila Wiggins, who'd travelled up from Bournemouth; Haydn, the sender of the original message and looking

after 'Jaws Obsession UK'; the idea of doing an event in Westhoughton – his. With an hour to go others were arriving...

The British weather! As you would imagine that is something we have to keep an eye on, its fickle nature can dampen any outdoor event. The Wetherspoon's beer garden with its Robert Shaw backdrop seen as the ideal location. It was dry but overcast, cool and rather blustery (seaside weather!). It was decided to do the event outside as planned hoping the rain kept away. Conditions not ideal, but once set up for the sound (a small pa), the balloons tied to the wall frames creating a foaming sea. With guests and contributors arriving we were soon good to go.

Proceeding halted whilst the Wetherspoon's magazine photographer had Ryan, Hayden and myself posing for official photographs with said book and inflatable jaws. Painstaking in its perfectionism – it took a while. A magazine feature will be seen across the land and a spotlight shone on Westhoughton and today's happening.

The event began in earnest a little after 11am. I did the introduction, talking a little about Westhoughton Community Network (WCN)... how it began, what it does and that how every now and then an unusual but interesting approach is made; any initial scepticism with more research and communication giving way to positive enthusiasm. 'Community' involvement was to be integral to the event – it turned out not just Westhoughton but the Jaws fandom. Haydn Wheeler (Jaws Obsession UK), then Ryan Dacko (Author, Screenwriter and Podcaster) introduced to the gathered audience. Part of proceedings a raffle for three signed books (two additional prizes donated by fans); marine conservation being a key part of the endeavour the 'Angling Trust' and 'Basking Shark Scotland' were to be recipients of proceeds.



Ryan, smartly dressed in his white jacket, notes in hand, began to talk about his inspiration, the podcast and book and its development, and being here in Robert Shaw's hometown and the significance of the actor on the role. In the movie, with a 'temperamental' mechanical shark, the actors had a lot of time on their hands; much was improvised or ad-libbed. Shaw's seasoned acting experience and creative ability enabling him to create one of the great screen characters. Passionate and in the moment, for Ryan it was a chance to be with those who have supported and encouraged him along the way.

Whilst a few would have read it, we were to have two first-time anywhere live readings from 'The Book of Quint'. 'The Prologue', introducing the story and setting the scene and later, 'Hired' (Chapter 21), set in Amity, where shipmate Hershel Salvatore (seen briefly in the movie) tells his story of best friend Quint.

For the reading, local amateur dramatic actor from Cornerstone ADS, Colin Gradwell had been asked and had prepared well. A cap and seafarer's jumper a nod to Quint. The prologue was long and detailed; it was interesting watching Ryan listening intently to the words he'd written being spoken by someone else – ever the perfectionist, noting when something didn't quite work or might need revising for the audio book. Colin did well adding drama to the reading, the wind trying to flap the pages not putting him off his stride.



Ryan got up again, going into more depth about the prologue and its objective in teasing people into the story and getting interested in the characters whilst resisting the temptation of putting too much in there. It had been important to introduce new characters into the story, such as the granddaughter Rebecca Quint. Ryan reintroduced Colin who continued with the second shorter reading with the no-nonsense Quint being described and brought to life there in his dockside workshop, steamed and cleaned shark jaws on the walls.



Wanting his book to be available in Robert Shaw's hometown, there were presentations made to community representatives – Bolton Libraries (Anne Burns) would have three books to made available to local people to borrow to read; Westhoughton High School (Nicola Walsh) was there for Westhoughton High School, a community school, itself a hive of theatrical and creative activity, and Westhoughton Local History Group (Marion White), whose role in bringing local history to the fore is significant and appreciated.

Given this was also a celebration of Robert Shaw, I then introduced Peter Schofield from our second amateur dramatic group (The Bethel Crowd) to read a synopsis of the life of Robert Shaw with particular



reference to his Westhoughton roots as revised by David Kaye (Westhoughton Local History Group) from Ernest Ford's piece for the Bolton Revisited.

Ahead of getting Ryan to answer questions, I asked where people had come from... many had come far and wide, travelling for hours from North, South, East and West just to be here. Subscribers and followers of the 'Jaws Obsession' podcasts and really pleased to have a chance to meet Ryan Dacko in the flesh and visit the birthplace of Robert Shaw - such was the draw of both Jaws and this spin-off endeavour. Also attending was Dave Bowen, an Area Sales Manager who works for Amberly publishing. Getting 'The Book of Quint' published will be key to future success. Could the UK lead the way?



Ryan spend ten minutes or so taking questions and giving more insight into what was behind the writing and what is going on Stateside with all the delicate negotiations and what could happen with a fair wind and some luck. He spoke of meeting son Ian Shaw and talking to him about the project; Ian having co-written 'The Shark is Broken', with him playing his father in the theatrical tale of how the actors coped with all the downtime whilst making Jaws. Ryan related that the project has taken three years of his life and necessitated support of his wife and family for the

sacrifices needed to make it happen with writing sessions and research to bring Quint back to life and explore the experiences and links hinted at in the movie and then create the new characters around him. Ryan confident that a story arc is possible with these characters and that other books *will* follow.

Ryan's passion, commitment and detailed knowledge of Jaws and the behind the scenes evident. Each step along the way bringing new insight and new connections, just one example being coming across a man recreating and building the ill-fated 'Orca' and what that taught him and how it added to his story.

Nearing the end of this part of the event, it was time for the raffle, overseen by Sheila Wiggins who manned the stall; the yellow 'Jaws' barrel, specially created by Haydn, now to play a key part in proceedings was brought to the front for the draw. Scraping the barrel, Tatiana drew the tickets. Three winners of the book, all voicing their delight; one winner was Kimberly Lawson, a librarian from Cumbria who had helped with promotion sending out a press release in her area. Another winner was a local lad, Jason Taylor, who acts and now directs with The Bethel Crowd, no doubt inspired by the day. The Jaws bubble bath and washbag were bonus wins. £150 was raised by the raffle to be shared by 'Basking Shark Scotland' and 'The Angling Trust'.

It was time to have some books signed... though the raindrops had started to be felt and proceedings moved indoors to the back of the pub, whilst organisers packed up. By now I'd completely lost track of time, I think we had gone over the allocated 2½ hours. The day wasn't over....



In the pub there was some intrigue as to what was going on. We thanked Julie and Adam; the local Wetherspoon's too would be presented with a book once the tour of 'Robert Shaw's Westhoughton' was done.

With the rain shower passing there was time for quick group photo of those who'd remained in the beer garden with the Robert Shaw display backdrop.



## Part Two – The Robert Shaw Tour

I take on the role of Tour Guide... *you wouldn't want our visitors to come all that way without seeing the sights!* Robert Shaw (born in 1927), son of a doctor and a nurse, lived in two houses in Westhoughton and attended the County Primary School at White Horse. It is clear he had fond memories of his few childhood years here, even though he was just seven when the family moved to the Orkneys. 'Houghton' appears in his literary output.

A group of 16 of us make the trek. By now a book and the yellow barrel are key props for the many photos that would be taken. We start at the Town Hall on Market Street. There we see the Robert Shaw plaque marking his stellar career as an actor, donated as part of the British Film Centenary in 1996 (Robert Shaw died of a heart attack in 1978, aged just 51). A passer-by gives us another Robert Shaw anecdote and informs us that you can still see the stonework denoting his father's surgery on the Bolton Road house...



Next, a visit to Westhoughton Library where in due course a couple of 'The Book of Quint' are to be found. I take the group upstairs to look at the historic Westhoughton artefacts including the local history group commissions The Pretoria Disaster [1910] centenary painting by Andy Smith and the Historic Timeline and Displays.

In King Street we visit the birthplace and first home of Robert Shaw. We were lucky to have in our presence



Nicola Ward, who earlier represented Westhoughton High School and who currently lives in the terraced house - a typical two-up, two-down with many original features. On the wall a new plaque replacing one that disappeared, it read "ROBERT ARCHIBALD SHAW 1927-1978 – Actor, Novelist, Playwright and Screenwriter was born here 9th August 1927. "You're going to need a bigger boat!"” Nicola kindly invited all inside to see the rooms and backyard and imagine what it was like all those years ago. It was a real treat for everyone who had made the



journey. Nicola herself has a fondness for Jaws trinkets and is very proud of the historic Robert Shaw/Jaws connection.

We next headed through Central Park and up Bolton Road in search of 'Oakley', the detached house which was both a surgery and a home for the Shaw family. It is opposite the former school, now a nursery, young Robert had attended. We were fortunate to meet the owner who'd lived there for many years and gave the group a little history of the house. The surgery stone though cracked still in existence at the foot of the door. Owner Dave Price tells us that they do get the occasional visitor asking about Robert Shaw – once a year and usually Japanese tourists!

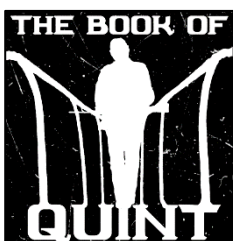
You do wonder whether the town could make more of its Robert Shaw connection...

### Part Three – Winding down

Of the visitors to Westhoughton a good few were staying over nearby before heading back home, though some would soon have to go. We all headed back to Wetherspoon's for a drink and some food and a chance in a smaller group to quiz and learn more from Ryan, who continued to talk passionately about the project and his hopes for it. Clearly the preference is to get 'The Book of Quint' published (as with Peter Benchley's Jaws) and then hope that the new novel is made into a movie adding to the Jaws story and legend. Ryan told us of the process involving agents, producers and legal representatives; how they need to produce professional movie boards that show how a film would look to attract the people to make it, then the funding to pay for it, before it is signed off by the studio. With its 'Jaws' roots and its characters having been seen before there are more hoops to go through and more people to keep happy. Stephen Spielberg who made the first movie would have a particular interest and final say in whether it gets to the screen. As such it would need to be just right and worthy of the characters. We can only hope that progress is made with a screenplay and a movie production; big money requires big box office stars, could a top actor such as British-born actor Henry Cavill be tempted to take on the role of a younger Quint? You never know...



The hubbub created got the better of one of the locals who came over and quizzed Ryan on what he was doing here all the way from New York! Ryan remained charming and engaged and won a few more people over.



So that was that, a long day... exhausting but enjoyable. It seems that the preparations were worth it. People delighted with how it went and what we achieved. Will they return to Westhoughton for the 50-year Jaws anniversary in 2025? We hope by then Ryan Dacko's hard work and commitment pay off and that at the very least 'The Book of Quint' is published and regarded as both a stand-alone novel and a significant addition to the Jaws – and Robert Shaw – legacy.