

Westhoughton Local History Group | Exhibition 2015

'WESTHOUGHTON AND THE THREAT OF SIEGE'

the Story of Development in Westhoughton

Westhoughton Library – ran from Saturday, 14th November 2015 into the New Year

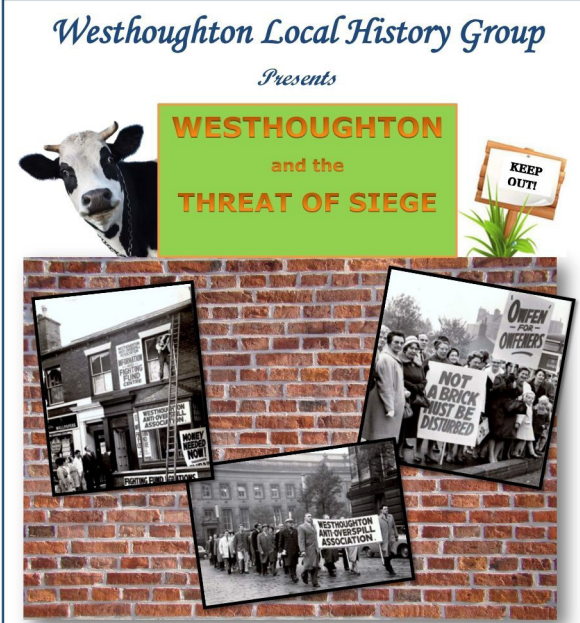
David Kaye writes: In recent years, Westhoughton Local History Group has seen dramatic growth in both its membership and its scope of activities, and it is now one of the largest, most innovative, and most successful heritage societies in the region.

Westhoughton Local History Group now ranks amongst the largest and most innovative heritage societies in the region. A strong and growing membership, well-attended bi-monthly meetings – the group's activities embrace presentations by internal and external speakers, field trips, publications and exhibitions. The Group's exhibitions have been extremely successful in profiling the town's industrial and social history, and have attracted large audiences, from within the town itself, but also many from much further afield.

Particularly noteworthy have been the exhibitions commemorating the centenary (in 2010) of the Pretoria Pit Disaster, the bi-centenary (in 2012) of the Luddite rebellion which resulted in The Burning of Westhoughton Mill, and last year's mega-display commemorating the centenary of the commencement of [World War I](#). Whilst these exhibitions focused essentially on major single events in the town's history, the Group's new exhibition project takes a close look at key aspects in the town's post-war development over a more protracted period of time.

Traditionally having an economy based largely on textiles and coal-mining, both these industries were in serious decline prior to World War II (indeed, the last of the town's coal mines closed in 1936), and in the post-war years, at least from an industrial perspective, Westhoughton was certainly in the doldrums. As a result of its close proximity to the city, and its large geographical spread, Westhoughton was seen as an ideal 'target' for Manchester City Corporation when, in the early 1960s, plans were drawn up for major slum clearances in the inner-city areas - notably including Salford - to be replaced by large-scale housing projects in areas significantly remote from the central areas of the city, which led to the frequent use of the dreaded label 'overspill'.

If implemented, the early 1960s aspirations of Westhoughton's much-larger neighbour would have seen thousands of domestic properties – and many businesses too – compulsorily purchased, with a new town emerging, its centre being located to the south of the railway line running from Bolton to Leigh. The complexion of the town would have been changed for ever.



Westhoughton Local History Group
Presents
WESTHOUGHTON
and the
THREAT OF SIEGE

KEEP OUT!

AN EXHIBITION featuring aspects of the town's post-war development, highlighting the successfully-opposed Manchester/Salford overspill plans of the 1960s, which would have changed the face of Howfen for ever.

WESTHOUGHTON LIBRARY (upper level)
SATURDAY 14th NOVEMBER to EARLY 2016
ADMISSION FREE (during all normal Library hours)

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Understandably, the reaction to these dramatic proposals within the town were instantaneous, vociferous, and almost universally negative. An anti-overspill campaign was launched, significant funds were raised to 'fight the battle', and the strength of this opposition ultimately resulted in a public enquiry. Eventually, the Minister for Housing and Local Government ruled that the Manchester/Salford overspill proposals were completely excessive in scope, and would destroy the existing town of Westhoughton. Manchester City withdrew its plans in 1963, and thus Westhoughton remained under the control of Lancashire County Council.

Fast forward almost a decade, and in 1972, LCC drew up a 'Westhoughton Master Plan', to define where private housing developments within the town could take place. This plan embraced the location of new roads, schools etc., but just two years later, the major re-organisation of local government nationally resulted in Westhoughton becoming part of Bolton Metropolitan Borough, with Bolton's planning department assuming responsibility for developments in Westhoughton.

In the wake of this, private developers had ambitions for major house-building projects within the town, not all of which lay within the 'building zone' approved by the earlier master plan. This led to the establishment of a second protest group, known by the acronym [S.W.A.N. – Save Westhoughton Act Now](#).

The activities of this group led to a second public enquiry, and again the protest group successfully achieved its objectives, with the rejection of building proposals on the grounds that they contravened Bolton's priority to build on brownfield sites. It was also deemed that building projects of this scale were not viable until significant improvements in the town's infra-structure (particularly roads) were implemented.

In the meantime, many private housing developments in recent decades have continued to swell the town's population, but the scale of current major new building proposals are once again causing great concern amongst Westhoughton's residents, with strong feelings being expressed with regard to the problems which will result, particularly with increasing traffic chaos, and lack of adequate local infra-structure.

The forthcoming exhibition – entitled 'Westhoughton and the Threat of Siege' – is the brainchild of the history group's Exhibition Project Manager, Garth Ratcliffe, assisted by group president Pam Clarke, and committee member Ruth Duckworth. Staged in the upper level of Westhoughton Library, and officially opened at 10am on Saturday, 14th November by the Town Mayor with other VIP guests including local MP, Chris Green, in attendance, it will run until early 2016 - admission is free.

Whilst the exhibition will represent the main public manifestation of the group's commemorative activities, other significant initiatives are also planned, visit westhoughtonhistorygroup.org.uk for more information.
