

WESTHOUGHTON'S GREAT WAR STORY

Westhoughton Library from Saturday, 2nd August 2014 (in situ until 11/11/14)

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.



The group's public profile has been greatly enhanced by the success of major multi-faceted projects such as the commemorations of the centenary of The Pretoria Pit Disaster in 2010, and bi-centenary of The Burning of Westhoughton Mill in 2012. Now, the group is set to make another major contribution to the town's rich social, cultural and industrial heritage, as it announces plans to commemorate the centenary of the commencement of World War I.

Led by principal researcher Pamela Clarke – who is also president of the organisation – a team of the history group's members has spent many months painstakingly piecing together the full story of Westhoughton at war, and this, coupled with Mrs Clarke's extensive researches in earlier years, has resulted in a most impressive and comprehensive compendium of material, giving a graphic and poignant portrayal of the role which Westhoughton played in the traumatic years of 1914 to 1918, both at the battle-front and on the home front.

Under the title of 'Westhoughton and the Great War', much of this material will be used as the basis for what promises to be a truly fascinating and informative exhibition to be staged at Westhoughton Library for an extended period. The free public exhibition was officially opened by the Town Mayor of Westhoughton, Councillor Kevan Jones (2/8/14); the exhibition remained in place until, most appropriately, Remembrance Day, 11th November.



The exhibition featured photographs, maps, battle plans, letters from soldiers at the front, diverse documents and World War I artefacts, with much of the material being on public display for the first time. But perhaps the most important feature of the exhibition will be the tribute to all the men of Westhoughton who paid the ultimate price, by means of a detailed index of all the town's fallen – totalling 221 men – which lists key information such as their regiments, and the dates and locations of their tragic ends.



A great wealth of documentary material has been assembled, however, the group would be pleased to hear from anyone willing to loan or donate any Great War artefacts with relevance to the Westhoughton story (contact number: 01204 696984).

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.

The publication 'Westhoughton and the Great War' by Pam Clarke, available from Westhoughton Town Library (£16) or by post (£18 inc. p&p), graphically illustrates how just one of countless communities has been galvanised into commemorative action, in this case, the small Lancashire town of Westhoughton, whose miners, mechanics and mill workers contributed greatly to the war effort - with 221 making the ultimate sacrifice.

