

## Exhibition tribute to local author at West Bromwich Town Hall



A special exhibition has been opened in West Bromwich Town Hall in memory of and to show off the highly-praised community work of late local historian Anne Wilkins.

The exhibition features examples of her work as an author of local historical books and other works.

It has been put together in a display cabinet in the entrance to the Town Hall by Anne's family and with the help of Sandwell Council staff, and was unveiled by Sandwell Mayor Councillor Dr Ann Jaron.

Anne, born in 1932, was brought up in Friar Park and was in her teens a student nurse at the former West Bromwich District Hospital before going on to train as a teacher. She taught at Harvills Hawthorn, George Betts and St Mary Magdalene.

Her daughter Ruth said: "Anne loved her family dearly and had four children, six grandchildren and now has two great grandsons. She had a zest for life and a strong community spirit. Her compassion for people saw her give many hours to fund raising activities for Guide Dogs for the Blind and organising many jumble sales. "In later life she was for many years a keen reader for the Sandwell Talking Newspaper and after retirement she found her calling as a local historian.

"All our family loved her dearly and will remember her as a warm-hearted lady who was dedicated to the people and places of West Bromwich."

Anne joined the West Bromwich Library User Group and helped to produce its publication "West Bromwich, a Century of Memories" in 2000.

She also joined the Sandwell Silver Surfers, upskilled as an IT user and, with support from Paul McIntosh, launched her own website, to support her research into the history of the Town Hall.

When she heard that a banquet had been planned to celebrate the opening of the Town Hall in 1875 she felt she wanted to capture the vibrant and colourful history of a building central to the life and times of West Bromwich inhabitants for over a century. She achieved this by inviting people to share their own reminiscences of the building as well as by researching the history of the building itself.

This led to her giving talks on the Town Hall and then in 2003 she published an avidly researched book "West Bromwich Town Hall" and later a DVD "The Town Hall West Bromwich - A History of a Black Country Victorian Building". These gave permanent testimony to the social and cultural importance of the building.

Anne was also heavily involved in holding a Grand Victorian Ball in the ballroom at West Bromwich Town Hall in September 2004, an event held to raise funds for the conversion and refurbishment of Oak House's 16th century barns.

She was also the inspiration behind the aptly named CD "West Bromwich Voices", funded by the Scarman Trust and published in 2006, which captured authentic local voices speaking about their memories of West Bromwich in the 1940s and 1950s.

In the course of her research for the Town Hall, the name Reuben Farley, the first Mayor of West Bromwich, became increasingly significant and she went on, with help from the West Bromwich Local History Society, to co-author a book in his memory.

Anne passed away aged 84 in October 2017. The unveiling of the exhibition was celebrated by two of Anne's two daughters - Ruth and Pam; son John, granddaughters Rebecca and Rachel and grandson Daniel, as well as great, grandsons Noah and Beau.

Also present were members of the West Bromwich Local History Society including Pauline Lawley, co-author with Anne of 'Reuben Farley, The Man of West Bromwich.' Sandra Carter who helped with the organising of the Grand Victorian Ball in 2004 also attended the event.

Photograph courtesy of Express & Star (from article 13.12.2019)