Walkley Community Centre unveils restored First



Representatives of the men's families are gathering from across the country for the first time to attend the unveiling. The ceremony will take place on Sunday 3rd August — the centenary of the eve of Britain's entry into the war.

The Club is now Walkley Community Centre and the windows were originally installed almost 100 years ago to commemorate the nine men who died. The windows have badly deteriorated over time and were at risk of falling out of the window frame. Portraits of the men were so badly faded that their likenesses could no longer be seen. The Centre has had the windows fully restored with the aid of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the Walkley Ways, Walkley Wars history project. As part of their work, volunteers on the project have tracked down photographs of five of the men from family members living across the country and these have replaced the faded portraits in the windows.

Eight of the men volunteered during the first weeks of the war while one teenager was conscripted on his 18th birthday in 1918. Three of the men died within hours and yards of each other on the first day of the Somme while serving in the Sheffield Pals.

Fiona Spiers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund in Yorkshire and the Humber, said "After two years of hard work it is wonderful to see the completed restoration of the stained glass memorial window. Great sacrifices and acts of bravery were made during the First World War and we are proud to support this project which celebrates the lives of the nine brave men from Walkley who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country."

Rick Allan, Chair of the Walkley Community Centre, said: “As the centenary of First World War approaches it is fitting we can conserve the memorials to Reform Club members who died in the war. The windows look down on the Centre’s snooker room where the Reform Club’s original billiards tables are still used today. It is thought provoking to think of those nine young men playing billiards on these same tables.”

Bill Bevan, the historian leading the project, said: “The men were just names until volunteers found out so much about the lives and families of the men that they are effectively brought back to life as living, breathing individuals who had jobs, lived with their families and enjoyed being members of the Club. This helps today’s generations living in Walkley make a stronger, more personal connection with the First World War, with its otherwise unimaginable statistics of death, injury and horrifying conditions. People still live in some of the houses these men lived in 100 years ago.”

The unveiling is accompanied by an exhibition about the nine men called 'Nine Men, Nine Lives, One Great War'. The exhibition will hang permanently beside the windows. The stories of the men can also be seen on the Walkley History website. Doors are open between 3pm and 5pm for public viewing of the windows.

Notes to editors

Walkley Community Centre promotes and advances the availability of education and, in the interests of social welfare, to provide facilities for recreation and leisure time occupation in order to improve the quality of life and for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Walkley area without distinction of sex or of political, religious or other opinions, by associating with the local authorities, voluntary organisations and inhabitants in a common effort.

In summary we want to:

- Generate a community spirit in our neighbourhood
- Provide both young and old with somewhere to go
- Fill the Centre with diverse and wide ranging activities
- Provide a focus point for Walkley events

Built in the first decade of the 20th century, Walkley Community Centre started life as the Walkley Reform Club. With an impressive snooker/billiards room, meeting rooms, hall and bowling green it was one of the main social centres in Walkley. By the 60s the Club was bankrupt and the building became abandoned.

In 1969 Sheffield City Council had proposed major developments in Walkley including large scale clearance of areas of housing from Carr Road to Cundy Street on the basis that the properties were unfit for human habitation. The result was the formation of the Walkley Action Group, which campaigned relentlessly for four years to save their community and the houses, which gave it its unique character. In 1973 they succeeded in reducing the proposal to such an extent that the majority of the proposals were shelved, properties improved through grants and the community left largely intact. It was just after this that the Group approached the Appleyard Trust to reuse the now empty buildings of the Reform Club as a Community Centre for the people of Walkley.

The building has many fine features including stained glass windows, which incorporate photos of local men who died in the First World War.