

Wakefield Historical Society

Wednesday 13 May 2026 at 7pm at the History Centre

“180 years of Eastmoor: its people and their houses” by Dr Joanne Harrison

The audience at this evening's event were rewarded with an extremely enjoyable talk, underpinned by much impressive and detailed research.

Dr Harrison's project was an activity-based exercise, including the involvement of groups of volunteers, in the main local residents of Eastmoor. A series of workshops complemented by practical activities on the estate had produced a rich data set, fascinating in itself but also hugely valuable to aid future researchers.

Joanne's talk was illustrated by many photos provided by the volunteers, contemporary maps and photographs from the archives.

The project had three time periods to consider and compare: To find out what Victorian Eastmoor was like – its houses and its people; to consider the development of the Council Estate between the 1930s and the 60s and then to look at the changes which had occurred over the past fifty years or so.

Participants in the project shared their own stories and descriptions of their houses from the early years of the estate in the 1930s and the changes they had witnessed – for instance, post war modifications and the changes brought about after Margaret Thatcher's right to buy initiative and improvements made as a result.

One of the ladies who took part in the oral history element of the project had lived in the same house since being a 5-year-old in 1930.

Beginning then with the Victorian era which had seen significant population growth in Eastmoor. Pre 1866, housing development had been ad hoc, construction quality was variable – often shoddy. Houses were often overcrowded with no proper sanitation.

Later, houses were required to comply with byelaws aimed at improving construction quality and safety and providing healthier environments. There was a more uniform approach with the introduction of improved facilities.

Joanne illustrated her fascinating talk with a series of maps which illustrated the wide range of housing stock of that period, from back-to-backs, through terraced houses, larger terraces to cottages with gardens. A strong feature of the area were the many yards, illustrated on the map of the Stanley Road area which was the main route through Eastmoor. It was busy with shops, houses and yards. Shops included carpenters, dressmakers, and a confectioner alongside three pubs and a chapel.

The pubs – The Albion Inn, Butchers Arms and the Fox and Grapes – played a central role in the life of Eastmoor. As well as serving drinks, the pubs hosted inquests, civic meetings, auctions etc. The story

of the Sellers family who lived in the area from at as early as 1851 was an enthralling drama of anti-social behaviour and crime, marriage and remarriage, early deaths through until 1904 when the family eventually left Eastmoor.

Jacobs Well Lane had a good mix of housing, which enabled generations of the same family to move locally from street to street as circumstances changed. Joanne took the audience through the fascinating history of the Smith Family. John Smith, a railway worker, moved to Eastmoor from Burnley in the 1850s and his descendants often worked in the same industry as each other as well as living in close proximity.

The third area under consideration was Warrengate, with more mixed buildings and including large industrial premises. Interestingly, Pincheon Street still exists today.

Council housing was built between the wars and after World War II. The estate provided housing for those who couldn't afford to privately rent or own; it provided replacement housing for the properties destroyed in the war as well as rehousing people from slum clearance schemes.

The phased construction of the houses, flats and maisonettes on the estate mirrored the architectural styles in fashion at the time – from the 1930s till the 70s and 80s, when the prefabs were replaced by the current homes and the 1930s houses were renovated.

The estate has provided a home for life, families were able to live in close proximity to each other and the mix of housing enabled people to move according to their changed circumstances.

The Twenty First century has seen substantial changes – new windows, doors, solar panels, more private gardens and such. Residents who took part in the project were generally pleased with how the estate is moving on, with a tinge of regret at what's been lost. In short, Eastmoor has proved to be a popular place to live for many generations of families throughout the decades.

Joanne answered many questions amid further discussions – a sure sign of the interest which her presentation had prompted. She received a well-deserved Vote of Thanks.

Steve Hargrave

16 May 2026