

MY LIFE IN CLAPTON: STAN ANSELL



Stan Ansell is a familiar figure in Clapton. For decades he ran a successful furniture business from the front of his home in Millfields Road. As part of our series looking at interesting characters in Clapton, we interviewed the 87-year-old former upholsterer and asked him about his life.

Clapton is where I was born and bred. There were 13 of us born by the river. I have pleasant memories of living there. Jumping onto canal barges, swimming in the river, with all the muck - but we survived. I used to go to the Marshes to watch the cricketers. The Orient used to play there too - and then the dogs took over. They were hard times, pawn shop days, but the community was close. People lived from hand to mouth. I can remember being sent to the bakers as a lad to collect broken biscuits. Yes, they were hard times, but good times. My favourite place is the river. They used to have a little parking area there. I used to knock down the wood a little and make them into bundles of wood and sell it to my own mother.

When I was a teenager I was in the Territorial Army and worked for an upholstery firm. But I saw the war was coming and joined up. There were seven of us brothers. We were at D-day, Dunkirk, Italy. One of us was a prisoner of war in Japan. We never really talked to each other about the war when we came back. I was in Burma. But I did spend the first 18 months, when I was 18-years-old, where they are fighting now on the Afghan border. I was in the Royal Artillery. I was away four years and 10 months and went to the School of Artillery, where I had a lovely number. But a landmine hit the house while we were all away at war and the rest of the family all had to be re-housed. But we all came back from war thankfully so we were one lucky family.

After the war mum relocated in Cricketfield Road, but everything was hard after the war. I went back to the upholstery trade, to my old firm and a few other places, then I set up my own firm around here. I had one or two lock-ups and a flat in Rushmore Road.

I came to this shop in 1950/51. I had workshops at the back. I made all hand-stitched stuff. It was all bespoke things. They came in here and asked me to estimate for their jobs and take commissions. I haven't got the patience now and closed the shop. I do still love to watch my son as he is an upholsterer too, but he is way above me. I sent him to all the best people to get trained and he does pieces for places like Chatsworth House.

Everybody knows me, but I don't remember everyone's names. I keep myself to myself. I am not talking about myself, but I do feel the elderly people today are a bit neglected, which is wrong because if they hadn't fought in the war none of this would be here. The elderly of London went through the bombing and nothing is too good for them.

Nowadays I go tea dancing - ballroom dancing. A cup of tea and biscuits and then a few dances. We love it. All the ladies lining up to dance it is wonderful. I really look forward to it. Everyone gets a dance.

My life here is so full. That's why I stay in the same place, but it has changed. When I first came here there were all lovely gardens on Millfields Road, now there are garages. Everyone seems to be well-off now, but the sense of community is not the same.

The Pond was a beautiful place. There use to be green areas in front of both the ambulance station - and the public toilets, where it was kept tidy and the elderly could sit. But there was a period when there was a hung council and they started selling off things and sold off the toilet area, which has since become a disgrace.

I am so pleased at last that something is being done with the Pond. People never realise what a beautiful area this was, but at least they are trying to do something about it now.

Interview by Jane Elliott

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL COUNCILLORS:
Cllrs Linda Kelly, Deniz Oguzkanli & Ian Rathbone

1st Sun each month, 11am- 12noon, Tenants Association Hall, Beecholme Estate, Prout Rd, E5.
2nd Sat each month, 1-2pm, Wayside Community Centre, 24 Chatsworth Rd, E5.
4th Sat each month, 1-2pm, Community Hall, Mount Estate, Mount Pleasant Lane, E5.
4th Sat each month, 2- 3pm, Community Flat, 10 Detmold Rd, Jack Watts Estate, E5.

Or contact 020 8356 5000 or 07890 654 068