

## **The Sally Ann Shop, 44a Mill Road. 5 August 1985 – 19 January 2019**

The much-loved Sally Ann shop in Mill Road closed on 19 January 2019. It relocated to a site in Tenison Road behind the Salvation Army Citadel. This is actually where the shop started before moving first to a cycle shop nearby, then to Mandela House, and eventually to its current site when the Fine Fare supermarket closed in 1985. The mirrors on the back wall are unchanged since they served as a device for the check-out assistant in Fine Fare to keep an eye on customers in the various aisles. Volunteers believe it to have been the largest charity shop in the country in terms of floor area. Until very recently it used to receive clothing and equipment from the British Antarctic Society since nothing is allowed to be taken back to the Antarctic in case pollutants should be introduced there. The left-hand window was noted for its display of B.A.S heavy boots, clothing and sleeping bags; a lot of which were distributed to rough sleepers in the area.

Mill Road TV have created two excellent videos about the Sally Ann, from 2016 <https://youtu.be/z9wgWQ4fRi4>, and from 2019, to mark its closing, <https://youtu.be/q0HTLmpaimM>

Mary Naylor and Caro Wilson, volunteers with the Mill Road History Society, visited on Monday 7 January to chat with some of the Volunteers; Susie, Isobel, Margaret, Geoff, Isobel, Marcus and Mark. We thank them for their contributions below. All agree that it is the friendly atmosphere everywhere in the shop that is the main reason they keep coming back. Some of them have been there more than 20 years.

Marcus and Mark work receiving donations at the back door and sometimes they go out on the van to collect large items of furniture.

- I like going out and seeing Cambridge and places in the countryside
- Someone went out on our van and they were carrying a wardrobe down the stairs. The one at the top let it go and it slipped down the stairs. He called out for his mate and couldn't see him anywhere. What had happened was that the bottom had come out of the wardrobe and he was actually inside!



## Margaret D

- My sister in law got me here and at one time there were six or seven of my family working here. I've even got my husband here now (Geoff D, Christmas Geoff).
- One of the funniest things I remember is a phone call. Someone thought they'd given to a charity shop, but they couldn't remember which one!
- A lady once kept ringing day after day to say she'd donated a purple sofa which she now wanted back, but we'd never had it in the first place!
- We've had great parties and put on good shows. I was Queen Victoria once.



*The ladies in the upstairs sorting room*

## Isobel M

- I've been coming for about fifteen years I used to come here with my father who used to come here all the time looking for this and that. When I started, I was between jobs. When I was made redundant, I started off doing two mornings a week, now I'm here all week except for Wednesdays. I do all the bedding, but I can do almost anything. I like everything, the company, the different things to do, helping others. I'll definitely be at the new shop.

## Suzy W

- I love charity shops and I love volunteering; it definitely keeps me going. I love seeing people, serving people, making money for a good cause. It's a service to the community, it's cheap and we do the £10 voucher for the homeless which we all enjoy doing, though we have had a couple of them urinating in the changing room.



## Geoff D

- I'm Christmas Geoff. I sort all the Christmas stuff and I do the window. Everyone loves the window. *[The window on the west side, overlooking Covent Garden has had a magnificent display each Christmas with a tree, furniture and a lot of dressed up cuddly dogs]* I started with two dogs, now I have ten. There's always people who want to buy the dogs. The kids love the dogs; I have Christmas hats for all of them. I'll definitely do something with the dogs in the new shop though we've got no shop window.
- This year we had a wonderful antique sofa. Someone wanted to buy it and I said 'No, it's part of the display,' she said 'But it's in the window.' I said I was too, but I'm not for sale!
- We have had the down and outs sitting in the window drinking their beer and eating their sandwiches.



- I separate all the different coloured baubles and make sure there are the right envelopes for all the cards. Some people give us their used cards and then of course they just have to be thrown away.
- When we started here, volunteers used to go round all the other charity shops to make sure we were charging the right sort of thing.
- I lived in Warkworth Street where my mum kept a University house, I used to come to the film here on a Saturday when I'd finished my chores. Anyone who had a birthday could go up the front and they were given a free ticket for the following week. Some had birthdays nearly every week. We were known as the 'Morning Minors'.
- You could always tell what had been on by how the kids came out, toting a pretend gun if it had been cowboys, making their coats into capes if it had been horror.



Caro Wilson and Mary Naylor  
January 2019