Angels in Wanstead

David Etherton

In the 26th of a series of articles profiling Wanstead's local community heroes, photojournalist **Carole Edrich** introduces us to David Etherton

Long term Wansteadian David Etherton has always been involved in voluntary groups and has done so much for so many charities that, when we sat down for a coffee and chat, he didn't know where to start.

Twenty years in the Round Table, five years now at the 41 Club (where Rotary Club members go after 40 years) and 30 years as a magistrate are the things David most remembers, but I know from others that he used to conduct tours for the Guide Dog School in Woodford Green and, rumour has it, that the proceeds from the sale of his wonderful clock collection went to charity.

He was president of the local Rotary Club for a good while. He told me: "I belonged to the Wanstead and Snaresbrook Rotary Club, but as membership dropped we amalgamated with Woodford Green. One example of what we do is when Ms Yvonne Dudley rang me up. She said she would like the Woodford Green Rotary Club to use her garden to raise money for charity. She's a lovely, extraordinary lady and showed me around. The garden is beautiful and has a raised stage area. I made a little brochure of my photos and gave it to the boys [at the Rotary Club, to help them decide what best to do]."

David has been in Wanstead around 30 years, had three wives and is now happy with his new girlfriend Priscilla. I asked him how long they've been together. His response was 22 years. He met her when he was a magistrate, and she still is one. For those who don't know, being a magistrate is a voluntary position for which you donate three days every month.

Eating is clearly one of David's hobbies, he travels to sample foreign fares and his favourite local hangouts are Gezi Park (you might find him there with his daughter) and the Nightingale Pub (he says Noel and his wife are lovely people and is effusive in his praise for Noel's cooking). I asked him what he thought of how Wanstead has changed. His response was: "I love it. We have two Undergrounds, a library, a post office and a green grocers. I miss the draper's shop, but we have some good entrepreneurs here."

The Rotary club recently invited a South African to talk to them. David decorated the room with South African and English flags. He gave them to Willow Brook Primary School in Leyton when the event was over. They've been so appreciative that they have asked if a teacher and two ambassador pupils (David says wryly they were known as monitors in his day) could come to a meeting in May to formally say thank you.

If any of this inspires you, why not join the sponsored two-mile charity walk arranged by the Rotary Club every September? Dogs are welcome, everyone has fun and they go for a slap-up meal after.

Some time ago he helped raise money for and arranged visits to a local home for homeless men over a number of years. He has raised funds for the Multiple Sclerosis Society, used to collect on the High Street regularly and three years ago he organised a dinner at Packfords Hotel, raising about £2,000 for the Wanstead Playground Association. Every September for about 15 years he has been involved in a stall at the Wanstead Festival raising money for a variety of charities. It's usually near the *Wanstead Village Directory* stall, so keep an eye out when you go.

The fundraiser that most caught my imagination sadly no longer goes on. He told me that someone at Fords had made a six-man bike, which the Rotary Club would ride at home and abroad for charity. That's a way to have fun and make space for the evening meal which, if our conversation is anything to judge by, would, like David, be something quite special.

For more information on Woodford Green Rotary Club, call **020 8989 2701**

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