

MY LONDON STORY



‘We bought the pub. For £1 million’

RETIRED SOUTH LONDONER Geoff Cudd has been going to his local, The Ivy House, for decades. When the beloved pub was sold to developers, the 72-year-old was instrumental in the campaign to save it from being turned into housing. It's now the city's first community-owned boozer.

The first time I saw The Ivy House, it was love at first sight. It had so much character. Young musicians like Elvis Costello, Joe Strummer, Jeff Beck and Ian Dury would play music on the little stage in the back room. You could have a cracking time with just a couple of bob in your pocket.

I'm a lifelong south Londoner. I was born in Lambeth. I've been bringing my old lady here for 36 years. Back then you could get a pint and a packet of crisps for about a pound.

You used to get some real shady characters in The Ivy. It was called The Stuart Arms back then. One of the Krays managed some of the acts that

performed. There was a lot of swearing, but I loved the salt-of-the-earth people you'd meet.

About six or seven years ago the pub was sold to a developer who wanted to turn it into housing. Us locals came together and managed to get the council to list the pub as one of the UK's first ever Assets of Community Value – that way the pub was protected and it couldn't be changed.

We raised £1 million in loans and grants and bought the pub as a community. It was a real David and Goliath battle. When we won it felt like we had protected a piece of London history.

The Ivy House is now London's first community-owned pub. We've made it into a space for locals to come together. We have kids' clubs, and yoga, knitting and dance classes. We keep the prices low, and you can get a pint of bitter for £3.

So often Londoners keep to themselves and are afraid to say hello to someone in the street, but

I think we're proof that being friends with your neighbours can lead to something really good.

Our pub brings the community together. Everyone has each other's backs. My old mucker Charlie, who had been coming here even longer than me, died a few years ago. He didn't have any relations so we all got together and organised his funeral. It was a real celebration.

When I walk into the pub, I have a spring in my step. People treat me like I'm royalty – it's a lovely feeling. I'm 72 now, but going here makes me feel so much younger. I've lived a happy life and I've got more grandchildren than I can count, but everyone who knows me knows that if you look inside my heart, you'll see this pub. ■

Interview by Thomas Hobbs

→ The Ivy House, 40 Stuart Rd. Nunhead rail.

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