

These are notes I made from the INTERVIEW WITH VERA, 3/5/12.

Vera is 98, born 1914. Married 1/6/48, Caxton Hall, Westminster. Lived in same flat as now since 1947. Married Benny 1948 and he moved in. He was Jewish, Vera isn't. She didn't convert; it wasn't an issue for either of them.

Owner who built Clissold Court was Mr Hickman. Vera not sure if he was Jewish. It wasn't true that tenants had to be Jewish, though most were. He had office in small 'temporary' building, at the back of first block, where tenants paid rent to him. All residents were tenants till much later, when a group decided to become leaseholders. Benny and Vera decided not to bother.

Vera says not true no children were allowed. E.g. Dr Hackenbrock, a German refugee, had a dental practice in first block and lived in middle block (Fiona's flat now?) with wife and kids (3?).

In 1947 Vera admired her friends' flat in Clissold Court. At their suggestion she moved into their flat unofficially, paying rent to them, when they moved out to a house in Hampstead. She used to get letters addressed to the very first tenants - 'Jo Daniels and his Hotshots'.

£3.10 as week was first rent . Rates were 10 shillings, i.e. £4 total.

Vera was a successful dressmaker. Customers described what they wanted, Vera told them what material to buy, then made the dress or coat . She started with a little workshop off Ronald Rd off Holloway, with ' Vera Modes' over top.

Did Vera know anything re dip in central lawn? Vera thinks may be linked to a landmine or bomb which went off in park, made lot of cracks in ceiling s and walls that had to be repaired. No-one was hurt. No air-raid shelter in Clissold Court; she was told that people went into the passageway into back garden during air-raids. She recalls going to a dance at Stoke Newington Town Hall: "People said 'get down on floor!'; I said 'no, I might spoil my dress!'" . V remembers stepping over people in tube, when travelling by tube: 'all those years, you got used to it.'

Dennis asked if Vera thought of leaving London during war? Vera: "no, I wouldn't leave London; my mother wouldn't, so I wouldn't. I was born in London, I'm a Londoner ... Benny her husband said "I remember being in that bloody desert, four years, and thinking would I ever see London again?"

Who does she remember? Cissie Barkan at number 1 , above her Elsie Levine, and a well-known milliner on top floor - Vera can't recall her name. Cissie had daughter called Silvia. Dr Hackenbroch the dentist was refugee from Germany; Vera doesn't know if his wife was a German refugee too. By look of waiting room in his practice (in no 2), which had a divan like a big bed on which patients sat to wait, she thought this may have originally been a bedroom and he only had that one flat, initially.

Vera was one of his patients, says he was fantastic dentist, with assistant called Ziggy. He left the estate when the lease extension was due, and too expensive for him.

Benny. When she was due to have a fitting, Vera's friend (also called Vera) asked if she could bring her husband Eric and a friend who was staying with them. Vera agreed. The friend was Benny. Benny had just been demobbed after 4 years in sands of North Africa. He'd come back to find his wife had left him for an American. He got divorced easily. Benny's family lived in Edgware, but their house was full up; he could stay overnight, but he lived with the friends as he wanted to live in this area, where he'd originally come from.

The day after this visit, a big bouquet arrived, and Benny rang and invited Vera out to dinner. Vera said 'sorry, no - already got an appointment for dinner. He kept on phoning, she kept saying no, then her friend phoned, saying "what's the matter with you?" When Vera did agree to meet she said she'd come out but only if (friend) Vera and Eric came too. Vera "can remember to this day" what they did. A'noon: to a club. V didn't drink or smoke. Then to a film in Leicester Square (she can't recall which film, small cinema next to Empire at time), then to dinner In a restaurant at back of Lilly and Skinners in Oxford Street. Eric and Benny seemed to know everyone, and a big fuss was made of Benny because he was just demobbed. All food was rationed, so a meal mustn't be more than 5 shillings. Vera asked waiter 'what could I have?' > waiter 'whatever you like' > Vera chose a lovely meal. Friend Vera burst out laughing, and said to Benny - 'Now you know what she *does* do - she *eats*!' From restaurant went to another club in Regents St, a night club. Vera had never been anywhere like that, had such a wonderful evening, went on til about 2 in morning. Vera: 'I never did those sorts of things. I liked dancing, in dance halls, but I'd never done anything like that.' At end of the long date, Benny came upstairs with Vera, using his cigarette lighter as there were no lights, opened the door with her key, pushed the door open, kissed Vera goodnight, and said - "I'll ring you" . Vera remembers "standing there thinking 'I hope he does!' There was no way I would have rung him!"

Benny wanted to meet Vera's mum straight away; mum was very impressed, telling Vera "he's something! Daddy would've loved him", and "If anything happens, it wouldn't be his fault, it would be yours". As she thought the sun only shone because Vera was there, this was praise indeed. Within a year Vera and Benny were married, and Benny spoke to Mr Hickman who made the tenancy official. Vera and Benny made quite a thing about their anniversary, but Benny made this his own important anniversary too - with cards, letters and poems, to celebrate the day they met.

Vera and Benny spent the rest of their time together living in the same flat in Clissold Court, where Vera still lives. Benny died on 9th January 2010. They were married 62 years.

No children. Vera 'I'm not a bit maternal' so OK when nothing happened. Sorry now, only because she has nobody. But she points out that even with children, you don't necessarily see them.

Dennis asked about other best times. Vera: abroad 2 x yr. Honeymoon = Switzerland; Benny said anywhere you like, but without sand!

Fiona asked re Clissold Court Socials. Vera: used to have BBQs in eves, with a little band, annually. Vera can't recall which years.

Dennis asked re politics. Vera: Parents very conservative. Margaret Thatcher didn't appeal to Vera in any way. 'I'm not a conservative'.

Changes in Clissold Park? Vera recalls boating in lake. Fiona: little train? Vera can't recall. She liked the walk through park to Church Street best, looking at the little shops.

Dennis asked re Vera's entertainments. Vera: can't read any more. Liked whodunnits. Now likes TV quizzes especially Pointless (with Alexander Armstrong). Loved cinema. Elizabeth Taylor 'what a beautiful woman'.

Vera always loved clothes, wore heels til in her 80s.

Today: Arthritis is Vera's main problem. But she still looks after her own flat and runs her life without assistance, and she still gets out.

Sally (38)