



# Charity *begins at home*

Discover what's in store at the many charity shops in Chiswick – you may just be surprised, says **EMILY HOPE**

**C**redit crunch and recession notwithstanding, I'm guessing your home is now bulging with new toys, clothes, gadgets and other paraphernalia acquired over Christmas. Before you twist an ankle tripping over a Transformer which no longer fits in the toy cupboard, or cause your wardrobe rail to buckle under the extra weight of clothes, spare a thought for those less fortunate and consider putting a few things aside to give to one of the many charities in Chiswick.

While the face of the High Road is constantly changing, one thing that seems to retain a consistent presence is the charity shops. There's a plethora of them, so no matter which cause you support, there's something out there you can donate to.

But beware, not just anything will do. While they may be the stalwarts of Chiswick, charity shops are also moving with the times.

## Charitable changes

Last year saw the transformation of Oxfam, from a classically dowdy charity shop to a boutique-style operation. The shop was divided into five sections; Loved for Longer – the traditional donated goods; Fair Trade Fashion; Good Fashion Sense – made from organic, recycled and alternative fibres; Made With Love – accessories made by volunteers and Reinvented – donated pieces redesigned by students from the London College of Fashion.

While eyebrows have been raised at the high cost of the new 'designer' gear – some

items have price tags upwards of £100 – it appears that the concept has generally gone down well.

Alex Walters, manageress says, "There has been a bit of a mixed reaction, some people coming in for the second-hand goods think it's a bit



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strange, but it's just a mind set. It's also brought in new customers and tapped into a new market for us – people who have money to spend but want something different, funky and ethical.”

Chiswick still has a significant proportion of donated stock, because, as Anna Thorne, Oxfam's retail development manager says, “That's what we do, how we raise most of our money and what people want. The other lines reinforce the different types of ethical and sustainable fashion.

“The concept was always intended to bring in new customers and it's certainly done that,” she continues. “People who shop at Whistles now also come into the Oxfam boutique, which is very gratifying.”

One former staff member adds, “Like any new product or venture it's a massive case of trial and error and, as a charity shop, we'd never bought new stock before, so we were really learning and adapting as we went along, but on the whole everyone was very positive about it.”

Meanwhile other local charities are also upping their game. On Turnham Green Terrace, Octavia's charity shop is also planning a makeover. Originally the Notting Hill and Ealing Charity shop, the premises were then taken over by the Octavia Foundation (another London housing and community charity), the sign was removed but not replaced, leaving locals confused as to what was going on.

It is still awaiting its new look, which will hopefully see a brighter, fresher approach. Manager Lucy Leibig explains, “It will focus on a clean and modern look complete with wooden floors. We are trying to alter people's perceptions of the stuffy look and smell of charity shops.”

Rather than go down the fashion boutique route, the Foundation has instead

brought in a standardised bric-a-brac section, after donations of this type were decimated by the arrival of eBay.

Lucy adds, “eBay has changed the whole landscape. We get significantly less bric-a-brac nowadays, as everyone thinks they can make a fortune selling their old stuff on the web.”

Barnardos is also about to be transformed. It is set to be featured as a case study on the TV programme *Mary, Queen of Shops*, where the shopping guru will try and help several charity shops create a new look to increase turnover.

Manager Elaine Brooks says, “I'm currently collecting bad items for the show. We get a lot of good stuff, but we also get a lot of duff donations. We send around half the clothes to ‘rags’ which we do get some money for, but the bottom line is, if you wouldn't buy it, then don't donate it.”

## Vintage charity

Of course some really valuable stuff is still handed into charities; Cancer Research UK has dedicated its shop opposite Turnham Green Church to retro and vintage gear. Often featured are pieces from the likes of Missoni or Gucci, so if you've got any classic labels hanging about, then consider dropping them off there.

Again, some people have criticised their high prices – often clothing will be tagged at over £50, but manageress Paula Ainsworth defends her policy. “Actually people go out of their way to give their designer stuff to me, as they know that the charity will get a proper amount of cash for it. If an Armani suit was £600 new, and we sell it for £60, it's a bargain.”

While the credit crunch may have affected many, if not all of us, at least charities do seem to be winning. “It's been amazing, we are four per cent up on target and counting,” Lucy explains.

So perhaps there is a silver lining to all this economic doom and gloom, and it's not just confined to your new designer dress from Oxfam. ●

## Top tips

- Donations must be clean; shops don't have washing facilities
- No electrical goods accepted
- No car boot rejects. If it didn't sell there it won't sell in a shop either
- Try to prune wardrobe regularly and give things in the relevant season
- Don't worry if it's a little bit damaged, (Oxfam do a repair service and can also use the clothes for its reinvented collection)
- Do donate valuable things, many shops have trained valuers to ensure the best and most appropriate price
- However full the shop looks, remember that donations will always be welcome

## Stockists

### Barnardo's

72 Turnham Green Terrace, W4 1QN  
020 8994 9931

### Cancer Research UK

278 Chiswick High Rd, W4 1PD  
020 8742 2501  
392, Chiswick High Road, W4 5TF  
020 8994 4391

### Octavia Charity Shop

46 Turnham Green Terrace, W4 1QP  
020 8995 8864

### Oxfam

190 Chiswick High Road, W4 1PP  
020 8994 4888

### Trinity Hospice

25, Turnham Green Terrace, W4 1RG  
020 8742 3036