



Two hundred years of history under their feet

By John Lawrence

This year marks two centuries in the same family for one East Finchley company, years that have seen the firm rub shoulders with Clementine Churchill, the Kray twins and every rank of society from the rag trade to the Ritz Hotel.



Two centuries in the same family: Richard, left, and Alan Myers in their current shop in East End Road, N2. Photo Mike Coles.

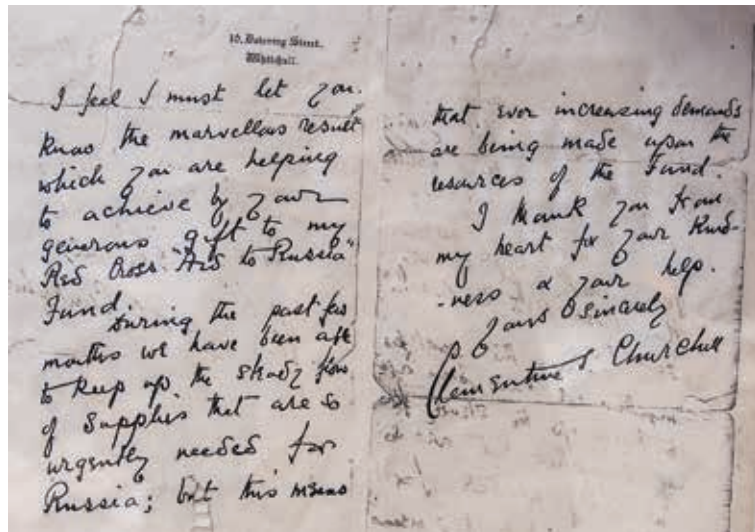
Myers Carpets has been trading in East End Road, N2, for almost 25 years but it traces its history back eight generations to the East End of London itself in 1819 when Morris Myers set up as a rag merchant. Over 200 years the business has adapted to survive, moving into government surplus and more latterly carpets.

Rag cleaning and surplus goods

By the early 1900s it was being run by brothers Jack and Samuel Myers, Jack being the great-grandfather of Richard and Alan Myers, who are in charge today. Jack handled surplus goods from the major shipping lines such as Cunard

and P&O, including carpet which he sold on in Blackburn, Lancashire. At the same time, their rag cleaning business was thriving, with huge bales

arriving in London Docks from as far away as Japan for their workers to clean, cut and recycle as wiping cloths for factories or carpet underlay.



Handwritten: The note of thanks sent to Jack Myers by Clementine Churchill during the Second World War.

Clemmie sends thanks

During the Second World War, Jack Myers received a handwritten note from Clementine Churchill, the wife of Britain's prime minister Winston Churchill, thanking him for donating surplus goods to her aid campaign, which sought to relieve the worst privations of the war in Russia. "I feel I must let you know the marvellous result which you are helping to achieve by your generous gift to my Red Cross 'Aid to Russia' fund," she wrote. "During the past few months we have been able to keep up the steady flow of supplies that are so urgently needed... I thank you from my heart for your kindness and your help."

Concentrating on carpets

An auction catalogue from

joined the family firm under their late father Gerald in the 1970s, helped him set up shop in East Finchley, close to where they had grown up in Hendon and an ideal base for selling to suburban homeowners. What changes have they seen in the last 40 years? Richard says: "When I remember the swirling carpet patterns of the 70s, I'd say people's tastes are much more restrained these days, with huge demand for beige and grey shades. And carpets and rugs are becoming more popular again after wooden and laminate floors were favoured for a period."

The future

At its height in the 1940s and 1950s, Myers employed upwards of 50 workers. Now



Cut to size: Richard, left, and Alan Myers in their carpet warehouse in Holloway Road in 1989

December 1969 reveals the Aladdin's cave of ex-government goods that Myers traded in: filing cabinets, motorised fans, telephone sets, lamps, chairs and nuts and bolts by the hundredweight.

During the 1960s, however, carpets became more important to the firm. They bought them secondhand from high-end establishments like the Ritz Hotel and foreign embassies and sold them on at auction or to East End market stalls, including one run by Charles Kray, the father of the notorious Kray twins Ronnie and Reggie.

By the 1990s, government surplus, the ultimate recycling trade, was dying out under a wave of company privatisation, so Myers took the decision to concentrate on carpets. Richard and Alan, who had

the East End Road showroom is run by just three or four. Richard and Alan have four children between them but none shows signs of wanting to carry on the family business. Richard says: "I'm not sad about that. They are great kids and they all have their own careers they want to pursue. Even after 200 years, everything comes to an end at some point."

"In our heyday just after the war we were a prestigious London warehouse with a reputation for being able to get hold of items that others couldn't. Now we have a quieter but steady trade in carpets, and that's fine. There's a good 10 years left in the business and, who knows, someone might take over the name when we eventually move on."

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