

Personal Profile

Name: Richard and Sue Parkes

Family members: Children:
Gareth - born June 1975
Jeremy - born February 1977
Craig - born September 1980

Address: Sibbersfield House

Dates lived at Sibbersfield:

April 86 to August 88, May 91 to December 93, August 2004 onwards. We were abroad with tenants in the house during the dates in between.

How did you come to live at Sibbersfield?

Richard worked for Shell in Essex and was transferred to Stanlow refinery in 1986. We searched for a home in Cheshire for 4 months while Richard commuted between here and Essex. Richard saw *many* homes and every few weeks Sue would come up from Essex on the train with three small boys (aged 10, 9 and 5) in tow to view the shortlist. We were also looking at schools and waiting to see if Gareth had passed the King's School entrance exam. Sue would look at the offerings and head back to Essex! Richard heard about Sibbersfield House from the agents before it hit the market. He went home that weekend and said casually "I've found something I think you might like". He was right. Sue and the boys saw it late on a Friday afternoon. They were taken through the "magic garden door" and down the long run and the rest is history. We talked about it all the way back down to Essex and made an offer over the phone that night. From first sight to moving in took only 20 days.

What are your main memories from living here?

We loved the quirky house with its six loos, three staircases and of course the clock tower, but most of all we fell in love with the garden – especially Sue. Those first two periods we were in the house in the 80's and 90's the boys were growing up and they loved the space inside and out. We quickly became good friends with Bob and Shirley Carter and their children Emily and Matthew in the Hall and with John and Brenda Bradley in the lodge. Many fond memories of the boys riding on Emily's horses – and falling off. Of haymaking in the summer and loading bales into the stable hay loft. Of VERY long games of croquet with Bob and Shirley – the record was about 4 hours for one game played over two nights. Of games of rounders in front of the Hall with everyone playing. Of many barbecues and joint Chinese takeaways. They were very special times.

What significant occasions/milestones happened while you were living here?

In 1987 we celebrated Richard's 40th. In 1993 Gareth passed his A Levels, turned 18 and got a place at Cambridge. The two younger boys finished school at the British School in The Netherlands. All the boys used the flat as a base while they were at Uni and Sue and Richard were abroad. Jez studied at Bristol Uni and Craig at Liverpool. In June 2007 Gareth and his wife Kate were married in the courtyard of the House and their reception was held in a marquee on the "croquet" lawn. Also that year Richard retired from Shell and we celebrated his 60th. In 2009 we persuaded Sue to mark her 60th with a party and had a wonderful time.

What condition was the property in when you purchased it?

The House had been created by the Parsons in the mid 70's effectively from servants quarters, the main kitchen and store rooms. They were understandably on a fairly tight budget – Will was only 28 when they bought! They sold in 1983 to Anne and John Read who did very little to the house other than covering the walls with wood chip paper which later cost us plenty of effort to remove. So when we bought it the house was OK but had potential!!

What changes did you make to the property?

We changed the kitchen substantially in 1987, sadly retiring the old Esse solid fuel cooker which had been there since 1937. When we phoned, the man at Esse checked the serial number and said, "Madam, that cooker owes you nothing!". We lined a chimney flue and installed a Vermont Castings wood burning stove on the west wall of the kitchen. In 1992 we added a bay window extension to the living room, put in a new fireplace and we changed the hall, dining room and downstairs cloakroom area quite significantly. In 1993 we had the pond repaired and attempted to waterproof it on the inside. In 1998 we had the garage, workshop and garden store dry-lined and plastered, put in new ceilings and new electrics throughout. The clock tower was thoroughly overhauled as was the clock itself. At the same time we ripped out the very sad wooden fence between the rear courtyard of the House and the Farm and replaced it with a very elegant brick wall. At that time we also replaced the "west bathroom" nearest the master bedroom, retiring the bubblegum pink suite which the Parsons had lovingly installed in 1976. In 2005 and 2007 we had the courtyards redesigned, all the york stone paving to the south and east of the house reshaped and re-laid and we had the pond rebuilt and lined for the first time. During the same period we replaced all the ceilings in the upstairs of the house and installed covings for the first time. We also completely revamped the bathroom in the centre of the house and the one in the flat. In 2008 we created a new front door and porch using some handsome oak timbers. We built in the old porch creating a new entrance lobby and we completely gutted the kitchen. We dug up the kitchen floor and re-laid it, at last eliminating the height difference between that floor and the rest of the house. We then redesigned the kitchen cum family room with underfloor heating, double glazed windows, a new fireplace for the wood burning stove, new units and appliances and at the same time significantly altered and enlarged the study. In 2009 we re-roofed the entire house and clock tower, sprayed the roof timbers for insects and rot and

installed more loft insulation. The clock tower was substantially renovated and the bell hung on new brackets. At this time we had the south elevation of the house repointed.

Potted history of personal information (occupation, hobbies and interests etc.)

Richard was born in England but as a toddler emigrated to Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in 1949 with his parents. Interestingly the ship they travelled on from Liverpool to Durban was the Diamed, a Blue Funnel Line ship. Sue was born in Rhodesia. Her father's forbears hailed from Scotland travelling to South Africa in the 1820's and on to Rhodesia by ox wagon around the turn of the 20th century. We married in 1972 and came to England in 1974. Richard joined Shell in 1976 as an electrical engineer and retired in 2007 as vice president for oil refining operations Europe/Africa. As well as living at Sibbersfield in three stints, we also lived in Essex, The Hague twice and in Durban South Africa – all assignments with Shell. Sue committed most of her time to supporting Richard and bringing up the boys, but she started working life as a junior school teacher, and later trained and worked as a counsellor, then became a facilitator running many life skills courses in The Netherlands and in South Africa. She is a keen sportswoman having played “first team” hockey, tennis, squash and golf in many countries. She is also a passionate gardener and has put thousands of hours into the restoration and maintenance of the Percy Cain garden which is today part of Sibbersfield House. Richard played squash for many years and also played and coached rugby. He is a keen sailor and has strained our marriage in many tense dinghy racing scenes over the years – he is a touch competitive. At the time of writing Sue and Richard have three grandsons who feature very strongly in their lives.