

3 Parkfields

In 1969, mum finally gave up the effort of maintaining a large family home on her own, whilst working part time. She sold Firsby Avenue for £7250 and we moved to a ground floor maisonette, 3 Parkfields, Shirley, that was about ten years old. I can remember viewing a couple of bungalows for this move, one in Langland Gardens, with an enormous square hall and one in Shirley Road that had a serious case of dry rot. The removal men turned up a day early and had to be told to return the next day. Although we were only there six years, 'Firsby' was always 'home'. I can remember being sad to leave as I walked Sparky to our new abode.



3 Parkfields (recent photo)



31 March 1975

3 Parkfields was almost on the Kent border, overlooking a park, 'Parkfields', at the front. The rear garden backed on to farmland belonging to the local mental hospital, 'Bethlem'. There were numerous pine trees on their side of the boundary, meaning that there was a wonderful smell of resin in our garden. If you lay in

the garden, you could hear the pine cones 'popping' in the sun. The cones also had Christmas decoration potential. It was a never-ending battle against the convolvulus that grew up the iron railings between us and the hospital. The only effective remedy seemed to



15 April 1972

be to unwind it and rewind it anti-clockwise. We hardly ever saw anyone on the other side of the fence, presumably the residents were kept well away. There was one occasion when someone did appear and claimed to be looking for a swarm of bees. Whether or not he was an escapee we never knew. Once there was a fire on their farmland beyond the pine trees.

There was a garage in a block up the road a small front garden and a back garden that was a reasonable size for that type of property; its only snag was that it was overlooked by the people living upstairs, whose garden was to the side. The garden contained two or three sumac trees, whose reddening leaves were always a delight in autumn. We still had our squirrels and the occasional fox. One squirrel even came into the kitchen to be fed. There was a small wall at the front but no front gate. Sparky would sit at the 'gate', knowing that she was not allowed out of the garden on to the pavement. When we said she could go, she would race across the road into the park.

I was allowed the large front bedroom on the left of the front door. Moving meant getting rid of the piano and the money from its sale bought me a unit consisting of two double wardrobes with a dressing table section in the middle. Sparky used to sleep under the dressing table and my cuddly

toys, by now out-grown but not parted with, lived on top of the unit. There was a small glass fronted section at the back of the dressing table for arranging perfume bottles in.

There was no scope for moving furniture around in this house and this unit lived on the far wall. My bed was on the door wall and bookcases on the left as you came in. The sideboard now became a cupboard for games and other bits and pieces. By the time I was about fifteen, I had a black



My Bedroom Christmas 1970

and white television in my bedroom. Actually, I had two, one had sound but no picture and the other a picture but no sound! These were stacked one on top of the other, you just had to make sure that they were both on the same channel; there were three to choose from by this time, ITV and BBCs 1 & 2. Posters were by now of popstars, cut from magazines such as *Jackie*. The walls in this room were painted pale green and in my mid-teens I was allowed to decorate it myself. Using about twenty pots of left-over paint, both emulsion and gloss, I covered the walls in multi-coloured splodges and dribbles; it was the envy of all my friends. Posters included the iconic one of Che Guevara, although I had no real knowledge of what he stood for, he was just 'cool'. I also had some pop art posters that were free with Crunchie chocolate ('Thank Crunchie it's Friday' was their slogan). Best of all I acquired a boyfriend who was doing art A level and later went to art college. He screen-printed me some wonderful posters archetypal of the 1970s. I drew some posters of my own. My best effort was a large gold hank cross superimposed on roughly sketched tiny people at a pop festival done in black marker pen. By this time, I had

multi coloured crochet blankets on my bed. One was made from what are now known as 'granny squares' and the other was striped. Mum had the small bedroom at the back I think she continued to use the same bedroom suite but now with a single bed.

The through living room had a brown tiled fireplace with a gas fire but otherwise heating was by electric, oil-filled radiators. The fireplace was later removed although a gas fire remained. There was no room for the three-piece suite so mum bought a set of Ercol chairs with



The Living Room Christmas 1969

wooden arms and green,

tweedy covered cushions. There were three ordinary chairs and a rocking chair, the latter I still have. In 1972, we acquired a colour television. In my memory it was in in time for the Olympics but actually it arrived in the November. I think that this was rented from Radio Rentals in the first instance. There was a wooden trolley that is still in the family. It had a removable tray on top and this revealed two sliding panels that in turn gave access to a storage compartment. When the tray was in place, these 'flaps' could be pulled out to extend the surface area. Mum also took up keeping tropical fish and we had a large fish tank in the alcove to the right of the fire. On one occasion there was a disaster when the thermostat failed, so most of the fish died as the temperature rose alarmingly. Only a kissing gourami (one of my favourites) and a few guppies survived. We had a breeding tank and did breed guppies. Attempts to breed mollies and platies were less successful as the young were usually eaten. Other breeds included, angel fish, colour-changing Siamese fighters, neons, harlequins, tiger fish and catfish.

Shelves for books were installed on an adjustable 'ladderax' system in the left-hand alcove. There was also a glass fronted china cabinet for ornaments and 'gay boxes', interlocking wooden squares that were hung on the wall to display small ornaments, such as mum's glass animals. We also had the 'must have' 1970s' accessory, a large rubber plant. The carpet was orange, later replaced by green carpet tiles. We did have French doors but for some reason rarely used them. It was 2014, nearly forty years later, before I regained access from a living room straight into a garden.



Mum in the Kitchen 15 August 1971

The 'wall' between the kitchen and the hall was made of frosted glass with a bobbly pattern on, as was the sliding door to the kitchen. This glass was always used to display Christmas cards. Above the sliding door, on the kitchen side, was a shelf where mum's favourite ornaments were kept. These included Beswick horses,

most of which only had three sound legs, cow milk jugs that I was never quite comfortable with (too many holes maybe), Sylvac rabbits and a collection of squirrels, acquired I think because dad's name, Cyril, was corrupted into squirrel. Other key ornaments were elephants that dated from great granddad's Oriental trip; there were two small ivory ones and one larger wooden one. There was also a collection of brass ornaments, some of which had come from India and others had been collected by granny and mum. These went on the shelf above the glass sliding door on the hall side. A games table, that I believe had belonged to my

grandparents, had the telephone on in the hall but I have no idea where this was kept at Firsby Avenue.

The combined bathroom and toilet was my domain every Friday afternoon. In some years we finished school at lunch time on Fridays and I would spend hours in the bath - adding more hot water, dozing off reading books and listening to the top 40 on the radio. For some reason I also remember the bathroom cupboard, with its mirrored door and smell of TCP. Both the mirror and the TCP came in handy for squeezing spots. We would attach a rubber hose with a shower like attachment to the basin taps in order to wash our hair.

Mum made three large rugs to serve as carpet in the hall. These had a white background with a series of concentric circles on them in autumnal colours. I remember going to the Readicut shop for wool for rug making materials.