

# Claydon People

## **Christina Kennedy**

openly admits she doesn't tend to stay anywhere for very long. However, until now, she has made an exception with Claydon. As she and husband Simon were celebrating their 10th anniversary here in the village in March, the duo were also preparing to start a new life down in Shepton Mallet, Somerset



From leaving school in Selly Oak, Birmingham, at the tender age of 16, Chrisi has had a long and varied career. While always having a keen interest in business, her professional life started at a firm of accountants in Birmingham where she joined as an audit clerk. Although enjoying her time there she quickly realised accountancy was not for her. "Accountancy is a bit boring in its own right," she says.

A stint of hairdressing was next, followed by a job at Commercial Union as an underwriter where she stayed for two years, before joining Wyatt & Green jewellers in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter as a junior office manager.

"I was there for a couple of years doing all the books, invoicing and wages," she explains, "It was great, but we had to keep our eye on the staff, especially the men. The gold shavings would collect on their hands and in those days men used to wear Brylcreem in their hair."

Chrisi explains the significance: "The bosses cottoned on that when the worker's hands were covered in the shavings they would run their fingers through their hair. They then went home and washed their hair and it was amazing how much gold could be collected. These men would then melt it down to make money. We always had to let the bosses know if we saw anything suspicious."

It was while she was at Wyatt & Green that Chrisi met her first husband and subsequently moved to Warwick. Sadly, the marriage ended after eight years and in the meantime Chrisi moved on to her next job. She admits: "I've never been a long term person because I get bored and hate routine."

This latest move turned out to be an important one for her. While working at a garden centre and landscape engineers as an office manager Chrisi met a chartered secretary who suggested she might like to take the institute exams which she duly passed.

In 1975 she came to Banbury to work at GKN, years before she was to move to Claydon. A second marriage followed and more job opportunities including running the village shop at Naunton with her second husband as well as holding down a full time job.

Unfortunately, a family of her own eluded her due to health reasons. But it was while working at Group 4 she met Simon. "When I became single again Simon was a big support to me. After a while as friends he suggested that we go to see Shakatak together one night in Birmingham and that's where it all started." A year later they were married.



Fast forward a few years to 1989 and Chrisi decided to set up her own business as a consultant company secretary initially working from home in Andover. The business was successful but during the downturn of the early 1990's Chrisi sold up.

Then after setting up another consultancy business and landing a major South African client, Simon came to work for Chrisi in 1999 but their house in Hook wasn't suitable to work from home and

that's when the pair came across Claydon.

Chrisi fell in love with Walnut House as soon as she saw it "The house was a building site at the time but the developers lent us some wellies and I instantly knew I just had to have it," she says.

Although Chrisi says the village hasn't really changed much in physical terms over the past 10

years, she says the people that inhabit it have. "There's a lot more younger people here working from home or commuting to Birmingham, London or Coventry she says. "We were quite unusual working from home back then."

However, some things haven't changed. "We wanted an allotment back then and were told there weren't any available and of course there were. After much hassle and argument we ended up having two. Of course there's still similar conversations going on now about the allotments. Things haven't moved on in 10 years, they should have and I feel sad about that"

Whilst here, the pair immersed themselves in village life with Chrisi becoming chairman of the Playing Field Management Committee in June 2007, treasurer of the Parochial Church Council at the end of 2007 and chair of the most recent festival committee.

Although Chrisi and Simon, who both celebrated their 60th birthdays last year, will be leaving the village this month, Chrisi says she will miss the walks, views and the church here. "I'm very fond of the church although I'm not a churchgoer. The church here has given me a lot of strength and heartache."



Known for her steadfast honesty, Chrisi is candid about what she feels are the more negative aspects of living in Claydon.

"I don't like small mindedness and harping back to the days of over 20 years ago," she says, "the village needs to live for

today and tomorrow not for the past. This needs addressing if the village is to survive and move forward."

Talking about village groups and committees, Chrisi adds: "Certain people need to not do a Maggie Thatcher and not stay on until they've outlived their tenure. They need to stand back and

help those new to the village. There's a lot of people here with valuable insight that could help take things forward, instead of using negativity they should use these skills in a positive way to help the younger people give the village a new lease of life."

Chrisi believes Claydon is at a turning point in its history. "There is so much will here to make things happen at the moment and to make Claydon a lovely, friendly, happy place to live. All that energy and enthusiasm needs to blossom so that everyone can enjoy it



"Claydon is no longer a farming village. Farming is important to the countryside but it's not the heart of the village anymore. It's more about the people that live here and their lifestyle and what they need. I've done a lot of things to evoke change in my life and I think change should be for the better and should be relished."

However, there is some thing, or rather some one that has been a constant in her life for the last 25 years. "Simon and I are

celebrating our silver wedding anniversary this year - just to prove I can hang on to something!" she laughs.

The pair look forward to celebrating their anniversary in their new home in Shepton

Mallett which includes two bungalows and an acre of land. "I look forward to having the chickens and the bees in the garden with me," says Chrisi, "and to having lots of amenities on the door step, but I shall miss some people in Claydon very much though I'm sure we'll stay good friends."

We wish Chrisi and Simon good luck in their new home and thank them both for their significant contribution to Claydon over the last 10 years.

**Lisa Simmons**

*An abridged version of this article appeared in the July 2009 issue of the **Claydon & Clattercote Courier**. A back issue can be downloaded from the Claydon website at [www.claydonvillage.net](http://www.claydonvillage.net)*