



PEAR TREE COTTAGE GARDEN

Let Pam Thompson lead you...



Up the garden path...

...and over the garden wall.



We moved here (as old newly weds!) in June 2004. The original cottage is a grade II listed building and was a very small part of the vast Witley Court Estate. It is estimated to be around 400 years old. Until the 1960's, the dwelling was known as Hillcrest. I'm not sure when the name: Pear Tree Cottage was acquired.

Pear Tree Cottage enjoys strong Police connections. It once belonged to Eric Abbott; the former Chief Constable of Worcester City Police prior to amalgamation. In 1967 and following amalgamation of the 4 Police forces: Herefordshire, Worcestershire County, Shropshire and Worcester City, Eric Arthur Abbott Q.P.M. became Deputy Chief Constable of the newly formed West Mercia Constabulary. The author (and Head Gardener) - also a former Officer of the law, actually served under the previous owner and in the same local constabulary – quite a coincidence! Needless to say, the garden has undergone immense change since those days.

GARDEN OVERVIEW

The gardens at Pear Tree Cottage sit in a cider apple orchard in the green and rolling countryside of Worcestershire, England. It enjoys a sunny south westerly aspect with sweeping views across to Martley Hillside, Woodbury & Abberley clock tower. The Teme Valley lies just over the hill and, not far away, is the Herefordshire border. Although our climate is temperate, our seasons are often uncertain and always a challenge to a gardener!

In 2007 the surrounding orchard was replanted with 24000 apple trees. The mostly neutral soil is fairly heavy on a clay base. The surrounding hedges had invaded the garden borders by as much as 3 yards in some places. Many shrubs were very overcrowded and congested - a phenomena of modern planting for the 'instant' look! We even found tree peonies beneath Hebes. There were no composting arrangements and the vegetable patch and greenhouse had definitely seen better days.

On the southern boundary is a high hedge between us and the lane. The border in front of this hedge is our woodland border and my favourite. It contains several mature silver birch trees, some Japanese Maples, a Ginko Biloba, Magnolia and Pieris. Beneath grow Snowdrops followed by Hellebores, Pulmonarias, Symphitum, Euphorbias, Narcissus, Lilies-of-the-Valley, Bluebells and Anemones. It's also home to 'Rob's Retreat', Al's seat, a Sequoia giganteum and Chris's wooden mushrooms! It is very much a spring border. We only spot weed and leave the natural leaf cover rather than fork it over.

This border leads uphill to the Fernery which isn't quite as shady as it used to be due to the loss of a big Japanese Maple and a Ceanothus. However it does retain a ferny sort of magic. The stepping stone path between the ferns leads to the top lawn past the telephone kiosk and Cordelia who stands on a rick stone with a chain around her neck to mask an earlier break inflicted with malice aforethought by a then teenage son!

The boundary hedge had invaded the borders which had in turn become congested and overgrown with a loss of 3 – 4 metres of useful garden. Just 3 panels of trellis was a home for 7 big climbers: Wisteria, Golden Hop, 3 Clematis, Jasmine and a Honeysuckle – a heaving jungle. The pond liner had sprung a leak and black plastic liner was always visible. Irises had taken over the water lilies. None of the lawns were either defined or edged and another early priority was to organise composting areas as hitherto lawn clippings had been secreted all over the garden. We arrived with 15 Japanese Acers in pots and struggled to find places in which to plant them.

From here we arrive on the top lawn which was dug, levelled and re-laid by us in 2006. We removed a couple of old plum suckers but, in the Top Lawn Border we have planted an Amelanchier, Magnolia, Ekianthus, Catalpa and several Acers & Viburnums. This planting actually replaced some major losses and the underplanting consists of varieties of Geums and Bergenias. Ridding this border of bindweed has been a REAL struggle and the battle continues. In 2012, we planted what is pretty much a rose garden around the other 3 sides of the top lawn. Nearly all are David Austen shrub roses.

Back in the early days, we re-paved the front of the house with reclaimed York flagstones. We also widened the path adjacent to the house enabling it to accommodate wheelbarrow traffic. Hitherto, it hadn't been possible to navigate past the front door pushing a wheelbarrow. The path leads from here to the greenhouse, studio and further on to the vegetable patch situated on the highest point in the north west corner of our garden. From here and looking west, we have a little orchard of our own with apples, a cherry and some lovely old pears. This slopes down to Cato's Corner where we have a 'House for Hens,' in the Hen Pen and the Hennerly. Looking south from our orchard is a pond and our rock culvert. A grassy path leads to a summerhouse which overlooks the pond and the Sofa border. The Lion Steps take you up to the terrace. From here we have views across Bulmer's' orchards to Martley Hillside, Woodbury Hill and Abberley Clock Tower - a well known local landmark. At the end of the terrace is a wooden door which leads to the secret steps. Go down these and turn right to find the Magic Mirror - a door to nowhere set back in the Yew hedge. On the north side of the orchard is our Aspen Grove which was planted in 2011.

In the highest corner of the garden is Thyme Square and the Vegetable Patch which is a raised bed made from reclaimed railway sleepers. Having pointed out the highest point in the garden: we actually measured the difference between the lowest and highest points. Any guesses? It's actually 15 feet precisely.

Surrounding the vegetable plot is a greenhouse, the studio and providing shelter on its northern and eastern sides is a native hedge. In the winter of 2011/2012 and in

order to have a little more level garden area, we did some terracing to the west of the studio and following down to the house. It meant that we have a now level bed with a pergola and a stoned terrace with a seat.

Even in this unkempt state, we fell in love with Pear Tree Cottage and its garden instantly – who wouldn't? With such a marvellous aspect and wonderful views – what gardener could ask for more? Well - I did ask for a lawnmower – that worked.....preferably, one that I didn't have to push! Despite it being summer (when grass grows fast) E.L.H. didn't quite appreciate just how urgent was my need! Having to push a mower everywhere was compounded by its very narrow cutting blade. Some weeks later, a little Honda Izzy lawn mower with an engine and a working clutch duly arrived and mowing became a little easier. There was no going back now!

In August 2004 Chris Pugh, Chief Gardener (herein referred to as CG) – professional Forester and Gardener (now of Martley) agreed to come and do 4 hours work, since which time, Saturdays have become sacrosanct (and longer) There are so many examples of Chris's talent, sensitivity, diligence and generosity throughout the garden. Chris was responsible for introducing us to another Chris – Genever: Master Builder (herein referred to as MB) but you'll have to wait until later to read about the many parts he has played in this garden!

Sacrosanct Saturdays have only been made possible by Ever Loving Husband (ELH) as he provides all the gardeners' sustenance in the form of gourmet lunches, afternoon tea, beers and snacks (including G's & T's) on each and **every** Saturday.

Over time, E.L.H. too has discovered the joys of outdoor garden work. It wasn't long before he was promoted to Under Gardener! His promotion was much deserved as he has since become an expert on the emptying of wheelbarrows, the manufacture of quality compost and works hard as our pyrotechnic research consultant specialising in the moisture content of bonfire material. Should any repairs or breakages occur, he's the first to offer both his services and **detailed** expert advice. His unfailing enthusiasm and support for the many garden projects undertaken continues to this day!

GARDEN BEGINNINGS

Having fallen head over heels in love with the garden and all its potential, it was time to make a start. Our first job was to clear and define the outer boundaries and work inside from the surrounding perimeter hedges. So that's how we began - working outside in! That very first Saturday in August 2004 when a young lad called Chris Pugh arrived, we started on the hedges and redefining the backs of the borders. Much of the hedge on the northern and eastern sides of the garden had died back or was too thin. In places, a row of conifers had been planted inside the hedge line. Most of these were either dead or dying and were subsequently removed along with what remained of the hedge behind them. This was quite a major job and ELH had

cunningly sneaked off to do a spot of operating in Germany. This boundary was then fenced and new mixed native hedging planted. We planted a mix of Hawthorn, Hazel, Blackthorn, Dog rose and Field Maple. Elsewhere, if not renovated, the outer hedges were all replanted and all now have been rabbit proofed. Inside the garden, old dead, diseased and dying fruit trees and others were removed and, at the last count, 73 trees (yes, trees!) of one sort and another have been re-planted throughout the garden. To name but a few, we planted a Wollemi pine, a Coastal redwood, a Dawn redwood and a Wedding Cake tree (*Cornus controversa variegata*).

Having finished the boundaries, the first major project inside the garden happened. In the spring of 2004, we replaced the original and somewhat dilapidated greenhouse with a bigger cedar Dutch light greenhouse. Despite ELH's utter confusion as to exactly *how* the new base should be laid, we managed it and this greenhouse stayed in place for 12 years.

In the spring of 2016, E.L.H. had had enough of banging his head on the low greenhouse door frame. If he ducked to avoid it, he stood up and banged his head on the heater suspended just inside. Worse still, if he successfully negotiated both, the inner door frame was guaranteed to *get 'im!* Enough was very definitely ENOUGH! The name Hartley Botanic found its way into conversations more and more. There is NEVER an easy time to replace a greenhouse! Somehow, despite the difficult timing and all sorts of deadlines – not to mention Open Gardens, it happened. MB gave up his Easter (greater love hath no builder!) to build the brick base in freezing conditions and the replacement house was up and running by May of that year. The frame and glazing were all built by Hartley Botanic on the occasion of H.M. Queen's birthday. This was a perfect excuse to have a celebration with all those who had helped and, later that year, it was officially named *The Queenhouse* when it was opened by Australian friends who came over to cut the ribbon!

During building, the grape vine, swathed in horticultural fleece, survived sudden exposure to frosts, being kicked, tripped over and snow flurries! Despite all this abuse, it continues to thrive a little more elevated these days. It really has gone up in the world in its new home! Despite being on the same footprint as the old greenhouse, it made a world of difference to the interior space which is much increased and no more head injuries! This is the third and definitely the last greenhouse!

I have to tell you about the tiles – Kyle's tiles in fact! They were a gift from Kyle who actually helped CG to dismantle the old wooden greenhouse where they had been originally laid. In order to re-recycle them, they were all carefully lifted and then, even more carefully cleaned off removing all the previous mortar. They looked so lovely in our new Hartley Botanic that MB appeared with extras - enough to tile beneath the staging. Having already sacrificed his Easter to build the base, we made a slate plaque which was placed to the left of the south door. To the right, you will see a clay niche – little addition courtesy of our esteemed builder!

I'm getting a little ahead of myself as, the adjacent vegetable patch remained in use without change after finishing the first greenhouse in 2005. I grew vegetables there for the following 2 years and until 2007 but more about that later.

GARDEN SUCCESS.

2015 also saw Pear Tree Cottage garden win a silver medal in **Britain's Best Gardeners' Garden Competition**. This was a competition organised by The English Garden Magazine which we associate with classical country house gardens. It was one of those competitions that I'd entered, didn't bother to tell anyone and then forgot all about it. After all, what chance did a humble cottage garden have? Ages and AGES after entering, I had a call to say that we had been shortlisted as one of 3 UK gardens. I was also asked if judges could come and view the garden. That's when I began to feel a tad nervous.

A date was duly arranged in June and luckily it was a perfect June day. Warm and sunny with a gentle breeze. I baked a cake especially as I thought I'd have more of a chance with a cake than the garden. A silver medal was a complete surprise and the most exciting thing about our silver medal was the arrival of a brand new shiny Cobra lawn mower as our prize!! Well, what could I do but donate it to E.L.H. himself? After all, he has encouraged me to forge ahead with all these projects! Following a further promotion, he is now allowed to mow the main lawn. Not the edges you understand - but just the stripes.

FAME ON T.V.

In April 2017 and, once again to our real surprise, we found ourselves entertaining a camera crew of 6 from **TV Channel 4's Shed of the Year Competition** who had come to film the Pear Hut Writing Room. With them was programme presenter: Will Hardie. I say surprise because the competition had been entered in the 'budget section' a whole 4 years earlier when the hut was first built. I'd well and truly forgotten about ever having entered! 6 TV crew members, masses of camera equipment, huge booms and 2 drones was far more than our little Pear Hut could even accommodate! This didn't seem to put them off and, full of enthusiasm, they filmed take after take!

The following June, we were invited to London for final's filming. The competition was astounding! Enthusiasts and eccentrics from across the country had converted or built such a vast range of 'sheds' varying from cathedrals (yes, a cathedral!) to museums. What chance did a little wooden hut have? To our amazement, The Pear Hut is now the proud owner of a runner's up rosette and was featured *ont' telly* in August 2017.

Over time and for one reason or another, Pear Tree Cottage Garden has featured in the media very many times. Articles have been written about so many garden features, we have quite a collection of newspaper cuttings.

At the time of writing, we have been opening to the public for the National Garden Scheme for over 6 years and biennially for the Gardens of Wichenford for about 8 years. We also enjoy visits from garden clubs, horticultural associations, W.I.

groups, artists groups and even foreign coach parties. All of this has happened completely by accident and I hold that Chris Pugh entirely responsible! If not for our village, **all** other funds raised go to the National Garden Scheme. We admire this charity as, unlike other big charities, it's run by volunteers rather than employees. We have only a small salaried staff at Head Office. In fact 81% of all funds raised goes directly to its caring beneficiaries.

None of this could happen if we didn't have the most wonderful dedicated support from friends who give up their valuable time to bake cakes, serve teas and wash up. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

Without exception, every project undertaken has been huge 'fun'. Now considering there have been 20+ major projects not always undertaken in ideal weather conditions; that is saying something!! For some weird reason, I have enjoyed every one. We have recycled very many items throughout the garden, not all in expected situations. Apart from the basic building materials, The Herb Garden is an example of either upcycling or recycling! Many items have been donated by friends and others have been acquired over time. That Chris Pugh is responsible for most of the statuary and although we have bought some from him, others remain in his possession and are just posing in the garden!

For those interested in the many garden changes we have made – read on! I have tried to list them all chronologically.

GARDEN PROJECTS

2005 – PUMP RESTORATION & ACCESS PAVING

In July 2004 Dave Gurney came to do a small building job restoring an inglenook fireplace and 22 months later had re-tiled the leaking cottage roof with its original tiles, re-laid paths using original materials from the garden, demolished the leaking log store and the rickety old tool shed and replaced them with more seemly facilities.

In the summer of 2004, Dave and I decided to investigate the well! We tried the pump – no luck! We then took off the cast iron plating and found a perfect 50' deep well with an original 'Pumpy' Thomas of Worcester water pump. After enlisting the experience and help of Mr. John Lane, we began by removing the well rods and then eventually; the cast iron pipes themselves. All 50 feet of them! Not for the faint hearted!! Thanks to Mr. Lane who repaired and re-washed the pump in leather, we cleaned up the pipes and re-installed everything. When water first appeared from the old pump, there was much celebrating! An electric pump was then installed to make better use of such a marvellous facility.

Despite the garage extension only being finished in March that year, it looks as if it came with the original garage! Even the Gardeners' Loo was moved nearer the cart shed so as to reduce the need for wellie removal! Over time, the broken rocking concrete slabs around the cottage were replaced with reclaimed York stone flags. In March of 2004 and, at the same time, the path in front of the house was widened to

accommodate mowers and wheelbarrows. The old sixties' garden room was replaced by the oak framed conservatory in 2005 and the terrace extended. After being added to, the original 3 panels of trellis were relocated to provide privacy and shelter above the reclaimed brick retaining wall. The top lawn was then promptly dug up, the ground levelled and new turf re-laid.

2005 - GARDEN LIGHTING

Back in the Easter of 2005, Dave Melhuish (of DSM Electrical Installations) otherwise known as Dave Electrician or DSM was working on the electrics in the office and cart shed. At the same time, we managed to persuade him to install some garden lighting around the main lawn. Back then, not so many gardens had lights and they were relatively expensive. CG and I decided that we could save money if we dug in the cabling ourselves - all ready for DSM to install the lighting. For this initial installation we thought half a dozen lights strategically placed was a reasonable number of lights for evaluation purposes.

CG and I set to work digging split trenches all round the garden. It was the worst time of year to be undertaking such a job. Easter was early and most plants were just throwing up their first tender shoots. Laying cables beneath (prickly) shrubs was both difficult, frustrating and VERY tedious. It was such an awful job in fact, I wondered if we had made a huge mistake. It took forever!! On the Bank Holiday Monday, we ran out of cable. Despite the holiday, DSM delivered more and eventually the job was finished and the lights installed.

I need not have worried - from the moment they were switched on for the very first time, we knew we had made the right decision. They looked absolutely **magical**. They looked magical when the light bounced off the leafy tree canopies. In winter they looked even more magical when highlighting the bare skeletal tree forms.

Over the years, lights have been added to and DSM has installed coloured lighting around the pond, the well, LED strip lighting around the Pear Hut and the Summerhouse and feature lighting in the Herb Garden. Even the arches have lanterns as do the terrace trellis and the General Stores. DSM gave us a really huge light which lights up the biggest conifer in the garden and MB set it up on a pillar.

Installing garden lighting requires much thought as one expects only to view subjects up lit or down lit. One does not want to have the lights themselves in full view. DSM has battled with rodents chewing through cables and gardeners accidentally severing cables. He has battled against the elements and has even donned waders and been witnessed waist high in freezing pond water to perfect underwater lighting. He has turned out at the last minute to make repairs before an Open Garden deadline, move lights and replace drivers thus maintaining his reputation for impeccable customer service!

Garden lighting gave us the idea to have our annual Garden by Candlelight evenings when CG lights 100's more nightlights and candles all round the garden. Whilst totally weather dependent, we have had some wildly successful evenings and some rained off failures. Even in the rain and snow – we still love our garden lights!

2006 - OIL TANK SCULPTURES

The following Christmas, we took delivery of a friend's old oil tank. It was supposed to have been an empty oil tank! I had this idea that silhouettes could be cut out and stood in the garden to rust naturally. Nobody could quite envisage the garden sculptures in my mind but E.L.H. endured its presence in the drive – next to the skip next to the rubble next to the builders' sand next to the concrete mixer next to the pallets of bricks.....sigh! I began to sense impatience!! In freezing temperatures on the darkest day of the winter, CG drilled a hole in the lowest corner of the tank in order to drain out the expected miniscule residue of oil! The first empty wine bottle filled up and luckily I didn't have to go far to find more! (it was after Christmas!) With every empty wine bottle now full and 11 buckets and in a bit of a panic, I had run out of both ideas AND empty receptacles! A 50 gallon drum was sent for. One's son, never having driven an automatic or a Range Rover (nervous shiver) was dispatched. He eventually returned – mission completed. Having accommodated all the oil, CG was then able to cut up each panel and store them away discreetly.

Luckily E.L.H. had a long operating list during this particular fiasco! Despite the drive resembling the Somme, we had done the worst of the clearing up by the time he returned from the hospital...phew! Luckily, his hard day's operating ensured he was too tired to notice much!

I chalked the outlines and CG got to work with a jig-saw. Despite the massive vibrations and the tedious work, the rest is, as they say: history. The outcome was two foxes: Ferdinand (running) and Fantastic Mr. Fox (pouncing) and a rather thug-like owl called Wol now, at the end of the brick path which leads to Kay's swing seat. Chanticleere followed suit and his home is on the Henclosure gate – as pin-up boy for the girls! I should mention the hare which is being pounced upon!

Wol has moved house a couple of times – well, three to be exact! He was originally down in Cato's Corner next to the Hennerly then he sat up in the old Pear tree at the end of the drive. That in itself was a bit of a mission as CG battled in a gale at the top of a ladder to secure him up on his perch. Quelle horreur! After all that, in January 2015, sadly the pear tree died and was felled. Wol found himself homeless so we moved him to the end of the brick path near Kay's swing seat where he remains.

The very snowiest and most Arctic-like day of that year was reserved for fencing behind the garage! Each time a tool was put down, it was lost from view due to an immediate covering of snow. In these blinding blizzard conditions, work progressed slowly due to the incapacitation by the added layers of clothing. E.L.H. had wisely chosen to take this particular Saturday off to do a spot of shooting with his chums and abandon the workers - whose needs had never been greater than that day! The hedge however thrived!

2007 - THE POND

In April 2007, the pond was restored. Just one word – *'restored'* for all the hard work entailed!! CG was Officer in Charge of supervising E.L.H on the 1st day of renovations (as sadly Head Gardener was scouting for bridesmaids' dresses in Swindon). Head Gardener returned to an immaculate scene of a large perfectly sculpted hole where once a stagnant swamp had festered. The author has been forbidden to divulge the name of the casualty who fell into the stagnating sludge but she would have sold her soul to witness the incident! Clad in a racey pair of swimming trunks, CG then braved the glacial temperatures of the well water which filled the pond to ensure the liner fitted snugly and then spent hours catching the resident Rudd!

Neither of us having a great fondness for those annoying little plastic baskets (or anything else plastic!), we tied bricks to the water lilies and lobbed them back in! Everyone thrived! Over time, the marginal planting has changed and evolved as CG has appeared with new additions!

In 2017, we inherited a huge shoal of goldfish. It didn't take Monsieur Le Heron long to spot these new residents and he has been responsible for a big reduction in their numbers. However, some remain.

2008 -THYME SQUARE

January, February and much of March 2008 saw work commence on Thyme Square. The old dying, diseased and overgrown hedge which had eaten its way into the garden was removed and the brash burned for 3 days and three nights. CG, at the helm of a mini digger, dug, levelled and moved earth then lugged in sleepers which we drilled through and stabilised with re-bar as the surrounding retaining wall. Thyme Square itself was made using materials reclaimed from the garden itself and much of the Thyme was initially grown from seed – planting out the tiny seedlings in the crevices and gravel.

The vegetable plot was extended and raised by one sleeper. A traditional mixed hedge was replanted along with a wild cherry, a walnut, a holly and a North American Coastal Redwood (*Sequoia Sempervirens*). Over time (s'cuse the pun!) the thyme became too much and obscured all our brickwork. It was dug out and the gravel between the bricks replaced. Thyme now grows in an antique Pugh urn in the centre.

The summer of 2008 saw retaining walls in the Creosote yard being knocked down and rebuilt further back – widening the Creosote yard by over a yard. The log store was moved further back and also the end terrace was extended.

2008 – 2009 THE PEAR GATE

The winter of 2008/2009 was spent making the Pear Gate out of an oak tree kindly given to us and delivered on his tractor by our neighbour: Roger Walker. This project also involved levelling and digging out 2 new compost heaps – building both bays out of old pallets. Chris masterminded the design and construction of the gate. The height of the uprights was governed by the weight we could both lift! During this work, the weather was utterly glacial and the unrelenting bitterly cold gale force winds funnelled through the gateway.....the very memory sends shivers! Progress was slow – VERY slow. So slow in fact, even E.L.H. became a little touchy (understatement!) about all the heavy timber lying on the ground and obstructing his passage to the compost heaps. We tried winching it up into position with Mabel (CG's trusty Land Rover) but, it was too heavy and Mabel was dragged towards the immensely heavy oak frame. It remained on the ground for weeks and then came the ultimatum from E.L.H. himself! Either we erected the arch immediately or he would do so himself. Unthinkable! It was Rob Holloway to our rescue – again. With the help of his Manitou, it was up and in position in less than 15 minutes – phew!

2009 - REPLACING A ROCKERY WITH THE CULVERT

In May of 2009, work was commenced on the Culvert. I should explain that where the culvert now sits, an overgrown and weed infested rockery once hid. We had this idea to remove all the rocks, dig a BIG hole and build a culvert using the same rocks. This would enable us to circulate the pond water making it an additional water feature.

A JCB digger, a power barrow and a turf cutter were duly hired from the nice man at Ermin Plant. A deep hole was dug, lined and the rocky walls were built. When CG ran out of rocks, he found another customer who wanted to dispose of her rockery rocks. How VERY convenient. More rocks appeared and were pressed into us.

The trouble is, with a digger in the garden, it's all too easy to have even more grandiose ideas. With a sloping garden, level areas are much yearned for. As if that wasn't enough, E.L.H. went even further and ordered a summerhouse. This meant MUCH more work and what began as a simple idea – to build a culvert from the existing rockery stones with a waterfall of sorts was now well out of control! Large amounts of soil would require moving, retaining walls would be needed, steps beside the culvert would need building, summerhouses require bases – all that sort of thing!

Heaven knows how we managed it but we did and it was finished in the nick of time the day before the Open Gardens weekend in 2009 with the turf being laid the day before.

2010 - PUGH'S PEW

In early February 2010, when heavy snow stopped all work outside, CG came and made Pugh's Pew out of sheer boredom! Until the top terrace was built; for many years it sat beneath The Studio window. See if you can spot this lovely chunky

bench made from Elm and Western Red Cedar. Today, it sits beneath the hedge in the Aspen Grove.

2010 - THE VEGETABLE PATCH

Later that same February a really massive earthworks operation began. After losing so many of our potato crops as they rotted in saturated ground for 3 consecutive seasons, enough was enough. The soil was rough and it was poor – too poor for regular growing of vegetables. It was simply too disheartening. We decided to grasp the nettle and to empty and refill the entire vegetable plot!! Diggers, power barrows and a dumper truck were hired – again, from the nice man at Ermin Plant Hire (with who by now, knew me so well, I didn't need to give a name when I called!

16 tons of clay came out and were replaced by 16 tons of high quality topsoil from Lancashire. Back then, there was no wide path behind the garage and the mess was quite incredible. All soil was carried through the garage and cart shed. It was depressing work. As the frost melted each morning the mud and clay stuck to the wheels and tracks acting like a magnet for the gravel on the drive. Once again, the drive looked like the Somme with hugely deep and muddy ruts – I told you it was depressing! When all was finished, the drive required re-gravelling. As it turned out it was completely worthwhile and had we known that we were growing vegetables in a clay bath, we would have done this job when Thyme Square was built. What it is to have hindsight!

April 2010 saw the stone stepping path to Compost Corner laid but as you read further on, you'll discover yet another change. We had hoped that the constant feet and barrows wouldn't wear out the grass in this shady area anymore. We were wrong!

2010 - THE ARRIVAL OF HENS

On June 13th 2010 4 newcomers came to live in the garden. A medieval style pole house known as *The House for Hens* and made in Shropshire was installed. Sandy, Bluebelle, Amelia and Black Betty were purchased from Newland Grange and moved into their new high rise accommodation. They had the freedom of the garden. I can already hear you thinking!

Well, it had to be tried! Four hens in 3/4 acre of garden. Just how much damage could these feathered creatures inflict? For the first few weeks – almost nothing. They learned to roost in their elevated house almost immediately and were too timid to venture far. Slugs and snails were devoured in a dainty fashion. Gradually, they became braver, more inquisitive and then, they took over the entire garden – with attitude. By the following spring, they had dug, scratched, pecked and vandalised their way through every nook and cranny. They were at it for every hour of daylight every single day. It was like having a plague of locusts in the garden. We were

constantly sweeping and raking up gravel and wood chip. They ate all the vegetables and generally behaved like looters. Something had to be done.

After that and, as a matter of urgency, chicken projects kept rolling off the press. First off - their winter quarters - the hexagonal *Hennery* (my design and idea) and which provides protection when there's a foot of snow on the ground.

Initially, we tried grazing them out on the Gaza Strip between the 2 lines of rabbit netting allowing them direct access from the Hennery and down their enclosed jet way through the hedge. It worked really well for a while but then the unthinkable happened! A fox killed Sandy in the middle of the day and was even witnessed (shudder!)

A secure Henclosure was the next priority. We used concrete reinforcing mesh as it was easy to curve and could be laid deeply so as to prevent killer vermin from digging their way in. When completed, it was followed by their bespoke oak preening perch and even an arch for their swing (made by a company called Fowl Play)! For shade in summer, their Bamboo garden was planted up. Following those fortifications, Sandy was replaced by Lulu and Priscilla at which point E.L.H. installed an electric fence. Lane's made the rather pretty Victorian gate replica (again - my design) and CG and I moved Chanticleer from his former perch and on to their gate.

The curved Beech hedge which surrounds the Henclosure was kindly donated and lovingly planted by CG. It's so nice to think that these young saplings which came out of his wood wouldn't have survived with the competition from all the other trees in his woodland. We curved the line to soften the whole appearance and make it look less like Stalag Luft IV. As it matured, I decided to grow it on as a mini pleached hedge. This way, the girls can look out beneath their hedge-on-legs! The jet way remains but isn't much used any more.

Over time hens have come and gone and I couldn't imagine life without any of the girls or their palatial surroundings. However, we've had our ups and downs. Following a major incident involving a fox strike in July 2016, we lost 2 more chickens: Cicely and Marigold. This meant that further fortifications were needed around the Henclosure. The fence was elevated and the electrified wires now overhang the Beech hedge. Justice prevailed: Mr. Fox was out-foxed and is now an ex-fox!

Even these fortifications failed when I discovered next door's cat attacking Tosca! After this attack we spiked the springboard post, added to and tensioned the electrified wires. It was lucky that I witnessed this attack as not only was I able to rescue Tosca but I saw exactly how the cat had managed to make its entry and exit.

As I update this in March 2019, our feathered flock of five are Marigold II, Wilhelmina, Tosca II, Beatrice and Esmerelda. They are without doubt the happiest 5 we've had.

2010 - REBUILDING THE SUMMERHOUSE STONE WALL

My own efforts at dry stone walling around the summerhouse turned out to be a bit of a failure. Actually, a lot of a failure for it started to fall down the very following summer of 2010. As I said earlier, Chris kept telling us that the man we needed was Master Builder: Chris Genever. Was he ever correct?

In July that summer of 2010, the new Chris (MB) arrived! I suppose it's always a bit strange working for people of whom you have no knowledge but, he set to work as the heavens opened! He rebuilt the little stone retaining wall around the summerhouse in the rain. We felt so sorry for him ELH went in search of shelter. When Chris turned around, he found himself building a wall beneath a giant umbrella erected by E.L.H. Having built a perfect stone wall (which still stands!), he levelled the summerhouse (ahem!) which enabled us to actually open the doors! Well, I did explain it was done in a rush before Open Gardens!

I learned that the secret of dry stone walling turns out to be a brick hammer! He made the wrong shaped pieces that didn't fit, the right shape with a brick hammer thus enabling them all to fit! He made the whole deal look easy peasy – but I know differently! Having come to build a small stone wall, he stayed and built an entire kitchen and utility! He has been coming ever since and we continue to admire the results of his endless talents, skills and wealth of experience whilst remembering the fun doing them all!

We wondered if MB would ever return and build a Rain Garden. However, things and ideas change as you'll find later.

2010 – 2011 THE HERB GARDEN

.....Well that was 2011! The rain garden turned into the Herb Garden and we loved Chris's statuary so much, we bought it! It was he who introduced us to MB (remember the wall and the kitchen?) who built the Herb Garden! Now that was a project and a half as we redesigned the Creosote Yard, built the barn, laid the top terrace and re-paved the paths all in the dry winter of 2010/2011. I say dry because it would have looked like the Somme for a third time if we'd done it the following winter!

MB and I even quarried the stone we used in this project. Much of the Herb Garden contains much cherished '*acquisitions*' from friends and, those which weren't acquired, were bought via EBay (where would we be without EBay?) Again, I learnt lots about building and how and when to rub down mortar and how to lay cobbles. I

even had another go at welding the old cast iron wheels and horse shoes which form the wall panels either side of the Androlia gate.

Even in the scheme of PTC's garden, this was a big project. The stone in the Creosote Yard was bought via Ebay from Kidderminster and the barn was built using planked Alder from CG's wood. There was much grumbling (as usual) about a lack of plans and the whole design evolved as materials became available.

2011 -THE ASPEN GROVE

Also happening in the winter of 2011 was the Aspen Project. Following a little sojourn to North America, one was asked (rather sulkily) why WE couldn't have Quivering Aspens in our own garden (hands on hips and a big pout!) Mission on!

I tracked a grower in Kent and placed my order. After felling an old Damson and removing some old relics, CG and I reshaped the Orchard Border and planted 7 Aspens. We under-planted the Aspens with all the Dogwoods which used to line the old greenhouse path and then, planted an avenue of Alchemilla Mollis leading to Pugh's Pew. We top dressed the whole border with a layer of wood chip. I sometimes think we're turning each border into a type of woodland without even realising! Maybe that's what happens when 2 gardeners both with rural roots work together! In 2015, CG arrived with the stone columns which he had bought on EBay. We loved them so much we bought them from him!

The underplanting was a bit of a pain. The Dogwoods grew too tall and being so brittle, kept breaking off in the wind. The Alchemilla Mollis, took over and flopped thus obstructing access to Pugh's Pew so were all removed and planted elsewhere. It was a case of having good intentions that just didn't work out! Instead, we top dressed with bark and wood chip for a natural look.....and waited!!

More changes happened in January 2018 when CG appeared with barrows full of Snowdrops and Aconites. Since when Pulmonarias, Anemones and Euphorbias have been planted. Well I did mention that Chris and I love woodland planting and we both share rural backgrounds!

2012 - TERRACE EXTENDING

In the winter of – 2012/2013 we, with the help of both CG and MB, we extended the conservatory terrace. Doesn't sound much of a job does it? Needless to say, it most certainly WAS! It involved digging out and laying in all the climbers, removing the trellis panels, knocking down the original wall, digging out more of the top lawn, rebuilding a new wall, replacing all the trellis and replanting all the climbers.....oh, and moving the steps not to mention the stone arch! The worst of it is, I much prefer the table in the old spot! Whilst we were doing this, it was

decided to replace the modern brick pavers with reclaimed York flagstones and the left over pieces were used to make the stepping stones in the Fernery and under the Pear Arch

We lost our dear friend Kay in 2011 and consequently inherited an arbour which we put in the top lawn border, a swing seat when we put down by the brick path and a couple of other benches. One is in the Creosote Yard and the other outside the Pear Hut. Ah -The Pear Hut!

2012 -THE PEAR HUT

This was an unwanted shed which we were given by CG. It was originally 10' x 8'. In August 2012, MB and I completely rebuilt it! It would have been far cheaper to just buy a shed but, it wouldn't have been *half* as much fun!! We used the left over flooring and roofing boards to make the frieze around the top. We even insulated and lined it – much was learnt about building techniques, mitering and general construction and I really enjoyed making the lead moustaches beneath the windows. The pears on the door hide a rather nasty plastic cat flap and the original UVPC windows were replaced with the present leaded windows bought on (you've guessed!) EBay. We finished it in October 2012! No more sheds or this garden is in danger of becoming a shanty town!

2014 -THE TELEPHONE KIOSK

Did I mention the telephone kiosk? I don't believe I did. This was another major project! The idea was to replace an ugly plastic 'coffin' in which garden seat cushions were stored. It looked so UGLY, I grew shrubs over it and then it became almost inaccessible. A better alternative was sought and a telephone kiosk seemed ideal. ELH and I squeezed into Clarence (CG's truck) and the three of us drove to Surrey to collect it. The driving conditions that February 2014 were atrocious! It poured down the whole way! The journey took forever. We admired our new purchase and watched it being loaded before heading for home. Another long journey meant that CG was late for his circuit training. So late in fact, when we arrived back in Martley, he just abandoned ship and left **ME** to drive Clarence, ELH and the kiosk home!

The following day, Paynes of Upton were commissioned to lift it over the hedge and into its spot skilfully avoiding the telephone and mains cables. It was at that precise moment I saw an opportunity to connect it up and have a working phone. I acquired original plans for the shelf and fittings and MB and I duplicated them. I found the phone on EBay and Jo came up with an old telephone directory (in which ELH can be found!) If I was brave enough, I'd paint an 'A' and 'B' button on the little cupboard but my brush skills aren't that good – sadly.

2014 - GATES & GATE PIERS

As if that wasn't enough, ELH fancied some gate piers at the end of the drive to replace the wooden ones. It was a God given opportunity to widen the entrance and build some new gates using some wonderful old hinges given to us by CG. In April/May 2014, MB built the piers (with help from his trusty apprentice) and was cajoled into making a pair of gates to a design I had scribbled down. The clever part was making the design fit the hinges. There was much rolling of eyes when the hinges were produced for the first time! Needless to say, it all went swimmingly and we love the new gates! It did mean that we had to make a gate in the same design to hang at the end of the path behind the garage but at least the hinge arrangement was easier!

2015 - THE CAIRN

A cairn was built in May 2015 commemorating the 70th anniversary of V.E. Day. We (ie MB and I) used leftover bits and pieces of stone and placed a time capsule inside it. We placed it near Kay's swing seat and it provides a small focal point at the end of a vista when standing at the top of the service path.

2016 - NUTBERRY NOAK

In May 2016, CG and I were grumbling about a distinct lack of room for any fruit growing. By coincidence he had conjured up some old oak posts and rails that needed a home. He suggested we use them to make a dedicated fruit patch next to the Henclosure recycling the oak as low fencing. Not only did he do this but he made a really pretty 'Hansel & Gretel' gate with the name Nutberry Noak (so called as we grow nuts and berries in an oak enclosure – clever eh?) It contains gooseberries, red and blackcurrants, raspberries, rhubarb (planted in March 2019), a small apple tree and a cob nut. I did find that the girls were a bit of a pain as they kept scratching their wood chip through the wire mesh and burying the gooseberry bush on the other side. As this is where the ground drops away, I shouldn't really blame them. Ideas were bounced around and Chris G remembered we had some left over corrugated iron panels on top of the log store. CG and I made a low barrier over which the girls can peep which now prevents this from happening.

2016 -THE SECRET STEPS

Having cut an opening in the Yew hedge (CG's idea) in the winter of 2015, MB came back to build the Secret Steps in June 2016. I say came back because, having quarried the stone necessary for the job, he incurred a serious knee injury so the steps waited for his recovery. E.L.H. now has a short cut though a new/old (!) door down the winding steps past the pond to the chickens.

2017 - COMPOST CORNER

Here I am again, writing another little update. As I write, it's January 2018 – how time flies! In February 2017, MB and I re-laid all the granite setts in Compost Corner.

The original setts had been laid in earth and, over time, had moved and sunk. Truth be told, they had become a bit of a hazard. Having lifted, cleaned off and stacked all the original setts, MB got to work with his mixer and this time they were properly bedded in and then pointed up with mortar. Remember the stepping stone path to Compost Corner? Well, the grass between the stepping stones never thrived and between the stepping stones it was very muddy when wet. The conifer kept growing as did the area of shade it cast! I bought more granite setts on EBay and the paving work continued. The stepping stones were replaced with EBay granite setts from Compost corner to the Star Gate (circular arch to anyone else!) Another pretty chilly undertaking but fun – as usual. As work continued over Valentine's Day, we (that is, MB and I but mostly MB!) incorporated a heart out of pink granite setts and also inlaid the year: MMXVII in tiles laid on edge. We now have a proper yard in front of both compost bays which is MUCH easier to sweep and keep clean.

2017 -THE GENERAL STORES

It was not until November 2017 that MB was able to return and this time, the project was to replace our tiny little 'hut' with a larger edifice! Much to everyone's surprise and having won runner up in the Shed of the Year competition with the Pear Hut, we found ourselves building yet another shed! Not another one I hear you say!

It was all the fault of our Chief Gardener! That Chris Pugh again! Yet another of his customers had asked him to dispose of an unwanted shed. With our little hut, at 6' x 4' and little bigger than a cupboard, how could we refuse? Just to keep MB on his toes, we converted it from a single pitched sloping roof to a proper 2 sided pitched roof. This meant Chris had to build 2 gable ends and make a roof truss for the centre. We were able to use the feather boarding from the original hut to make up the wall height. Of course, there were the usual complaints about a lack of plans but he did have the services of his trusty apprentice who did her best to compensate for this omission! Also as usual and, it being November, the weather was freezing. During all construction, E.L.H. was O.I.C. catering and hot drinks. We needed extra T.L.C. to ward off the bone chilling temperatures and a splash of rum in a hot chocolate was never more welcome!

Having finished construction, we then turned our attention to hard landscaping by extending the path of granite setts to the new (recycled) shed's front door. We now have a much more spacious 12' x 8' shed with an inbuilt apple store, outdoor cushion shelving (the cushions that is, not the shelving!) and bespoke umbrella rack all standing on an elegant brick base looking a little like a Hansel and Gretel chalet with a pear shaped window in the door beneath a roof canopy and pretty roof finials along the ridge. Almost before we'd finished building it, E.L.H. managed to fill it and is really very pleased with his new store. (The cushions never did look quite right in a telephone kiosk!)

2018 -THE LONG WALL

The gardeners were fed up with continually grazing their knuckles on the wall along the very narrow path behind the garage when wheeling barrows. It was especially annoying on dark winter evenings! Time for more change! In January 2018 MB

came to build a low retaining wall for the hedge and at the same time widening the path and putting in a curve to increase the width at its most troublesome and narrowest point. He capped it with some fabulous original Victorian capping bricks which he did as a surprise. It's a HUGE improvement and far less need for medical treatment! DSM (who you may recall is responsible for all the garden lighting) came and installed lights. Lugging logs in the dark has never been easier!

2018 - GREENHOUSE TERRACING

Not long afterwards, we decided to extend the terrace in front of the 'Queenhouse', replace the old sleepers and mimic the dry stone wall on the other side of the steps. MB did a marvellous job of giving us a little more room and eking out the small amount of stone – hence the shape of the new Dahlia border! H.G. had to endure much banter about the lack of materials for our Master Builder!

2018 - THE JETTY

March 2018 also saw a jetty by the pond being built. Yes, you've guessed! Another MB construction and a most useful addition. It replaced a pile of rotting logs most of which had rotted down to sawdust and in May, he returned yet again and replaced the old pine pergola with some chestnut hop poles. It looks so much more rustic and in keeping.

2019 - THE PELARGONIUM PLANT THEATRE

April was when I took a second look at some wonderful ¼ sawn English oak we had left over from an earlier furniture making exercise. It came via Chris Pugh from the garage of a 1950's film star!! I had always fancied a dovecote and some shelving for plants. It seemed obvious to combine the two ideas and then persuade Chris Genever that it would be a fun project! I even drew him a picture of my idea and so, by way of a change, he had some sort of idea of what I had in mind. During construction, I realised that with a dark backing to the shelves, plants would lack light on one side and therefore grow very one sided. Mirrors were the obvious answer! Avian accommodation is at the top with 3 entrances for doves. The triangular panel is removable for cleaning and we still await tenancy applications! With 60 lbs of lead on its roof, all the mirror glass and the oak itself, the whole construction was hugely weighty!! Needless to say it was hugely successful and a really fun project.

2020 – SURPRISE GREENHOUSE PROJECT

When our Hartley Botanic greenhouse was built, we laid some lovely floor tiles beneath the staging. As there weren't enough to do the entire floor, we bricked the rest of the area. Well over the 4 years, I really tried to like the bricks – I really did but, next to lovely yellow and terracotta chequered tiling.....how could I? In 2019 I accidentally bought some matching floor tiles on EBay! For a whole year, they lay gathering dust and cobwebs until in June, M.B. made a return visit! Not only did we lay the tiles, but we made an under floor fernery covering it with old cast iron floor grids. It was Chris's idea to plant ferns and then he made the fatal suggestion of L.E.D. strip lighting!! It was, as they say, a no brainer. DSM was soon on scene with coloured lighting that fades across the spectrum. (He has such an artistic approach

to lighting!) We then added shards of mirror glass and I've popped in a few more ferns. Now, it's another garden feature - with a nocturnal aspect!!

2021 – AN OUTDOOR KITCHEN!

Having been given a lovely old cast iron range by none other than Mr. Genever himself; February saw its installation in the Herb Garden. I absolutely love it and when it first arrived could hardly wait to install it. Various friends have contributed accessories such as a flat iron, an old enamelled saucepan, a brass kettle & some old kitchen scales. With a mini outdoor kitchen, we really are bang on trend!

2021 – MOVING DRAGONS!

During the strange pandemic summer of 2020 and whilst enjoying a rare moment of actually sitting in the garden, I had this idea!! Yes, yet another one!! If the Dragon Posts were moved a mere yard and a half nearer the Well Path, we'd be able to have the terrace table the other way round allowing at least 2 people to enjoy the view from the long side of the table – as opposed to a single person sitting at the end of the table. At the same time, it would even be possible to pass the table with a wheelbarrow and gain access to the compost heap via the lawn. Both C.G. and E.L.H. thought this was a brilliant idea. Genius in fact! Obviously, this was a job for early spring.

Fast forward to March 2021! We began by lifting all the roses (and pruning them!), removing and rolling up the turf, breaking out the granite setts, digging out the Dragon Posts and a very great deal of ivy. Everything was moved over 1 ½ yards and lovingly replaced. M.B. returned to reinstate the setts along with a pair of new chestnut posts. The dragons now enjoy the same view from a slightly different position and we loved the effect of having a larger terrace area!

2021 – GETTING CLASSICAL!

In 2020 C.G. arrived with a pair of semi naked '*right looking stone tarts*' on the back of his truck! Two statues which were impossibly heavy. After sustaining a crushed thumb during unloading and transporting them to the Top Lawn Border, they were named Ten Ton Thumbelina and Hefty Hetty! Having no real home, they languished - partially hidden by the beech hedge in the Top Lawn Border.

In April 2021 M.B. built two rather elegant piers either side of Kay's Arbour on which they now stand. He also replaced all the loose gravel between the bricks on their

path and replaced it with mortar – a HUGE improvement. We're now waiting for the avenue of Yew trees to establish. It's all looking somewhat classical!!

2021 – FRAMING THE CIRCULAR BOX HEDGE.

July 2021 was when Chris Genever (AKA Master Builder) found time to come and lay the lovely Victorian path edgers around the Box hedge which surrounds the garden well. Not the easiest of jobs for two reasons! One - the ground slopes in two directions so the pavers have to be laid in two planes. Two – you can't see where you started or where you need to finish! Needless to say, Chris made it look all too easy. Not only did he lay all the edgers but those with the broken tops were all cut allowing him to use the bottoms as pavers. This was a HUGE advantage as it allows lawn edging around the pavers as opposed to the edgers which would have been really difficult.

2021 - WISTERIA REVEAL.

After 17 years, I decided that I really wanted to see our Wisteria!! I mean it's gnarly twisted trunk which had always been entirely obscured by a big old and very dense Winter Jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflorum*). C.G. thought this was a tad radical and questioned the wisdom of such a 'root-and-branch' (pun fully intended!) project. Needless to say, I had my way and we set to work removing the Jasmine and not only revealing the Wisteria trunk but also a large section of cottage wall hitherto never ever viewed! Having done that, the next task was to have some brackets made to support the Wisteria. These were designed by Chris and made by James at J.W. Lanes Agricultural Engineers at Stanford Bridge. It's proved a big success and after painting the newly exposed area of wall looks super smart. As soon as it was all finished, Chris loved it as much as I do – phew!!

2022 – Cleft Chestnut Gate Arch

A very special gate lives in this garden! It has the letter 'B' in its design and was made for me back in the 70's as a birthday present by my father. It sat in an old archway made from half round fence rails which, over time, had rotted and were falling down.

Cleft chestnut was my answer. I made a design and ordered the chestnut in the spring of 2022. The waiting list was long and it was eventually delivered later that summer. In August Chris Gener (MB!) came and so my design took shape. Simon painted the gate highlighting the 'B' in white. I decided the 'B' should now stand for Bulmers' orchards – that was until grandchildren visited! When asked what the 'B' stood for, there was no hesitation as they chorused simultaneously, "BUMPLES!" Well, they've never known me by any other name. I should have of course realised what the 'B' stood for!!

2022 – Noah the Mower

During the summer of 2022, ELH was too poorly to do any mowing. With so many trips and extended time spent at far flung hospitals, I was having trouble keeping up. The answer to our problems was robotic! A marvellous company OHMS and their technician Martin supplied Noah the Mower. Indeed until Noah arrived, they lent us their demo mower. You could say that ours is actually Noah IV as Noah I was stolen by gypsies, Noah II was lost by the couriers and Noah III arrived damaged! These adventures failed to faze the staff at OHMS! Their service has been outstanding.

Happily ELH improved dramatically – so much so, Noah the Mower took a sabbatical for much of summer 2023!

2023 – Surprise Exposure!

January 2023 took a bit of a surprise turn as we found a whole 7 page feature on Pear Tree Cottage Garden in the very glossy English Garden Magazine! It followed on from our Regional win in The Nation's Favourite Garden Competition and contained some lovely photographs taken by Ian Thwaites (garden photographer & RHS judge). He came when the Wisteria was out and, as a result of all this publicity, we had lots more visits and made a record £6000.00+ for charity!

April 2023 – Save the Summerhouse

Not a major project but certainly a BIG improvement! The retaining planks around the summerhouse had rotted out and soil was encroaching on the summerhouse base – quelle horreur! With a need to economise: concrete slabs laid on end were the obvious answer. M.B. arrived and work commenced and progressed with great speed. In fact the project was finished in no time at all. The trouble was, they just looked so awful! Then, in a flash, H.G. had an absolutely genius idea! Why not use all the offcuts from the Victorian path edgers used around the well and secure them to the slab edges? It worked like a dream – even M.B. agreed. An elegant finish to a basic material.

September 2023 – Project Path

Since all the various roofing projects, I had accumulated upwards of 700 roof tiles and secreted them behind the garage. E.L.H. kept enquiring what exactly was to become of them. He even suggested I sell them on EBay. The trouble was they were such a mixed bunch – different sizes, materials, shapes, vintages some with nibs some without. It was madness to hire a skip in which to dispose of them so, there they remained all stacked up against the garage wall.

AND...then it came to me!! Another genius idea!! They could all be laid on edge and replace the lethally slippery stepping stones along the Fernery Path where it is far too shady for grass to thrive. I put my idea forward to E.L.H. angling it from the safety point of view!! He wasn't a bit keen but I thought it was worthy of conducting further enquiries and so consulted M.B. One didn't want E.L.H. to think he was being overruled – it was merely an enquiry! Much to my surprise and delight M.B. said it was a great idea and furthermore he had built something similar some years

earlier which had been a great success. Great for traction and any danger of algae on wet flagstones being the cause of injury would be gone forever. We knew that a large amount of soil would require removal to accommodate tiles on edge and bedding mortar. A skip was hired and work began. I should have given *knees* a thought as, 10 days later when it was finished, did I ever have sore knees!!??! So much so, I treated myself to a new pillow soft kneeler!

I already had a secret stash of beautiful Victorian path edgers (courtesy of C.G.) and these define the snaky curves of the path edges absolutely perfectly.

Despite E.L.H.'s initial doubts, as soon as work began, he embraced the project. Of course we had to add some detail so we have the date at one end and a rising sun the other and a few diamonds along the way! It really is a great success and absolutely guaranteed non-slip! E.L.H. loves it – in fact we all do!

PERSONNEL ADDITION

I really need to mention Simon Claxton here. He should be known as P.E – Painter Extraordinaire. He has been coming to Pear Tree Cottage and garden for a few years now and should have been acknowledged much earlier. He is an absolute wizard with a paint brush and doesn't mind creosote in the least. He has been helping to ensure garden features look their best at all times and keeping things looking spic and span. He not only looks after the house interior but much more importantly, cares for garden structures! 2021 has seen him not only transform the red letter box but also telephone kiosk to the high and very exacting standards of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott himself! As if slaving away with a paint brush wasn't more than enough, he brings his lovely family and friends to visit the garden and generously donates to our charity (The National Garden Scheme)!!

EPILOGUE

Every couple of years I try to remember to update this blurb. Inevitably, each time I do so, it becomes longer and probably more disjointed as garden features continue to change and further projects are undertaken. There have been many smaller projects such as widening the drive in 2012 and planting the Laurel hedge. I have listed only the more major ones. Having said that, taking out a massive Leylandii hedge with a digger and widening the drive by 4 feet was quite major!

Hopefully, if you haven't nodded off with boredom and you've managed to stay awake to the end....

Do have a look at photos of the garden as we found it

Glossary:

CG Chief Gardener (Chris Pugh)
DSM Senior Horticultural Lighting Consultant (Dave Melhuish)
ELH Ever Loving Husband (Alistair Thompson – Under Gardener)
HG Head Gardener (Pam Thompson)
MB Master Builder (Chris Genever)
PE Painter Extraordinaire (Simon Claxton)

(Updated 23.II.MMXXIV)

