

THE GARDEN

The basic lay out of the garden was Joan's design. The first work which we did in it, prior to moving in, was to plant the rose bed and flowering shrubs in the front garden and to build the rock walls around the two pine trees. One of these developed heart rot and blew down in the Spring of 1967, narrowly missing the house and making a rare mess of the built up semi circular lawn which had been sown the previous September.

We had decided that the garden should be mainly lawn but that it would be much too big a job for us to tackle. We were fortunate in finding a most helpful and skilled contractor in Mr. Hartley of Ladden Hill, Wheatley. After laying the semi circular lawn, the front circle and the lawn at the west side of the house in the September and sowing a fine, relatively slow growing grass, he came again in the following Spring and laid the area from the Saumarez-Smith's boundary and following roughly the line of trees to the silver birch and up to the Scott's boundary. The remainder we left rough with the intention of taming it as time allowed.

This lawn laying coincided with the delivery to Mr. Hartley of a brand new gleaming red and yellow Massey Ferguson tractor which did a magnificent job in ploughing and then levelling the seed bed. The levelling was done by pulling a heavy metal bar time and again around the garden.

In spite of the sandy soil Mr. Hartley was careful about drainage, hence the slope and the undulations from the house towards the rear boundary. Even so he could hardly have been expected to guess that close to the tree stumps near the yew trees was a very thin saucer shaped layer of clay about twelve inches below the surface. After the first heavy April showers, fortunately before the lawn was sown, we woke up one morning to find a large pond at the bottom of the garden.

After it had dried out, we excavated and found the clay - about two inches thick. We dug a large hole, about 4' cube, filled it with stones and builder rubble and have had no problems since. We also put in a couple of land

drains leading roughly from the lower shrubbery to the rockery and to the maple tree.

In 1967 we planted the maple tree (a housewarming present from Irene) the espalier apple and pear and the half standard apple and pear. By 1974, the only one of these which had borne fruit was the espalier apple. We also planted the soft fruit area in what is now given over to vegetables by the Scott's fence.

In 1968 and 1969 we slowly reclaimed the derelict areas making the first of the island beds - the crescent shaped one in front of the rose pergola. We also planted the beds at the bottom of the garden, but did not tackle the wilderness between them and the boundary apart from planting the Christmas tree which is now developing into quite a decent larch.

The whole of this area was a mass of nettle and ground elder and Joan used to sit down there on her waterproof cushion carefully picking out the roots by hand after I had forked up a sufficiently large piece for her to work on.

We had a fairly difficult time in those two years for my mother died in 1968 and Joan's mother in 1969. Christmas 1969 saw Joan laid low with 'flu and this was the beginning of the end for her. It was ten years, almost exactly since her first heart operation, and this latest illness strained her heart again so that the doctors decided she must have another operation.

This was scheduled for late May and for the first three months of 1970 she hardly even walked around her beloved garden. I think she felt that she did not have much chance of surviving the second operation, but she never said so and we made plans for how she would spend her convalescence. In the first week in April we decided to buy a summer house where she could sit and watch the view after she came out of hospital. We decided on its site as we walked around the garden one Friday evening. On the Saturday we went to Reading to order it. She died on the following Wednesday about midday while I was on my way to Solihull.

Although it all seemed rather pointless then, I kept on with the plans that we had made. Helped by friends from the church and relatives the summer house was erected, the rose pergola completed the terrace at the back of the garage laid, and the remainder of the wilderness towards the Bishop's fence conquered. This completed all the plans that Joan and I had developed for the garden and although I planted various other shrubs and plants which people had given me, they were done without any consistent plan.

The second big impetus to the garden came in the Autumn of 1971 after I married Irene. The first development was the herbaceous bed between the American oak and the larch with the opening up of the path behind it. In 1972 we built the rockery, using some stones which I rescued from the demolition of the original Wesley chapel in New Inn Hall Street, and planted the shrubbery adjacent to the tree stump. We also planted the ivy in front of the garage and laid the low stone retaining walls around it and around the quince in the front. We also planted the Bramley and the first four cupresses *Leylandii* as shelter for the shrubbery.

In 1973 we developed the bed on the west wall of the house, planted the jasmine by the oil tank screen, added some more rose bushes and planted four more clematis - the *Jackmanii* and the *Bees Jubilee* on the tree stumps and the *Ville de Lyon* on the west wall. In 1974, inspired by the success of the first shrubbery, we dug out the larger one between the elms and the yews. Apart from its decorative value, this was also planned to make a natural break between the grass which would be closely cut and that which wouldn't need attention quite so often. Also in 1974 we planted another five cupresses and the crap apple and the clematis on the rose pergola.

The other large and somewhat unromantic project in 1974 was to move the compost heap in order to enlarge the vegetable area as an attempt partially to offset the inflation in food prices. As part of this, we ripped out all the soft fruit and prepared an area for it about half the size adjacent to the summer house.