

GARDEN CHRONOLOGY 1983-2024 (41 YEARS)

We arrived here in 1983 – the following chronology illustrates an evolving garden where ideas were tried and tested, some did not work, others did. Gardening is certainly a learning process every day.

1983: No plants front or back, 2 almost dead apple trees, 2 forsythia, 2 Willows and 7 Leylandii.

1984/87: All fences replaced in 1984. All came down again in the 1987 Hurricane along with one willow and our chimney pot that scored a direct hit on next doors greenhouse.

1987: Vegetable plot established where the current courtyard is. All fences replaced – this time more robust.

1990: Fruit cage built where the galvanised troughs now stand, and a new compost heap established where the rose bed is now.

1992: First greenhouse installed (where our sitting room is now) and the start of adding flower beds in the area where the current greenhouses and patio are. Dead apple trees removed.

1992/2000: Front driveway added, grass taken up and replaced by a sleeper bed and gravel. Front fences replaced. Started taking up back lawns and adding beds and brick paths. Sheds put in at the back of the garden. First paths built by Sue Wright (RIP). Sue worked with us in the garden for over 15 years and taught us a great deal about gardening.

2005: We moved out for 7 months whilst major remodelling took place in the house. This changed the orientation of the house in relation to what it looked out on. Deck and winter beds added. Two new greenhouses set up and initially surrounded by shingle and pots, but later changed to the current configuration. This area was bordered by a dangerous elder and Hawthorne at the time. Initially the site of our plant sales. All remaining lawns removed, and lawn mower given away.

2006: Courtyard, raised beds, and water feature added. We did this as a distraction project to cope with the grief of losing my beautiful sister Siobhan and Denis's Mum Alice (she liked to sit in this part of the garden in the afternoon sun). The planting in these 3 beds has associations with them.

2007: Summer House added to the garden. This was originally Aideen's working at home office but later an area to have tea on open days and in 2024 it will become a sewing room.

2008: Began growing and propagating succulents for the first time. Opened the garden for Seaford in Bloom and other local charities for the first time. Won the Seaford in Bloom 'Plantsman's Cup'.

2009: Opened for NGS for the first time, as a pair of gardens, with Driftwood. Charlotte Weycham, 'The Galloping Gardener', photographed and reviewed the garden saying, "Is this the smallest botanical garden in Britain?"

2011: Leylandii taken out, creating far more space and light than we imagined. Native trees added. Left with a dreadful mess of fencing as the garden borders 7 gardens at the back. We negotiated with all the owners, and we replaced the fence (they were delighted). Moved plants sale to this area and added tables and chairs for afternoon teas. Old garage with the asbestos roof taken down and new brick garage added. Climbers and a vine added to grow around the garage.

2012: New seating area added to the long border. In November 2012 the street flooded and poured into the garage. Thankfully we eventually managed to persuade the council to add a new storm drain. Moved compost area from side of garage down to the end of the garden and built the compost bays.

2013: In January, we had long period of snow and ice (think it was the last time we had serious snow). We lost lots of plants and the fruit cage collapsed under the weight of snow. Gazebo was not safe due to weight of climbers, so we replaced it. Despite being cut back to the ground, the Clematis and Akebia re-grew.

2014: Articles on the garden appeared in Sussex Living as 'Plantsman's Paradise': there is a copy in the summer house.

2015/16: Long border revamped. Bed in front of the summer house removed to provide additional seating. Hawthorne and elder hedge removed near the greenhouses and a raised bed and Portuguese Laurel added to provide a screen. Shingle patio replaced with brick. Three cut flower beds created and paved. Second seating area added to long border.

2017/18: Added a deck to the bottom of the garden for an afternoon tea area. Raised brick bed added to the front garden and front borders revamped.

2019: The hazards of having pots on the top deck meant that the joists were rotting from all the watering. The whole deck was replaced after we re-homed a family of toads who had taken up residence there.

THE BIG REVAMP PHASE 1

2019/21: After opening the garden for the NGS and others for 10 years we decided to have a year off to travel a bit more and undertake a major revamp of the back garden. Little did we know at that time how Covid 19 and other health issues would impact on these plans.

We had three major reasons for the revamp: Climate Change was the first; some very invasive plants/weeds were the second; and finally, we needed to create spaces that were more manageable for our age. We seemed to be spending our lives watering after 3 years of incredibly dry summers and the Willow tree that dominated the central part of the garden was taking away water and beginning to undermine the paths. When we moved here 40 years ago it would have been unheard of to leave Echium, Dahlia, Gingers, and Cannas outside to overwinter, now there is no problem.

The Invaders

Three plants had become the bane of our lives. **Aegopodium Podagraria** (variegated ground elder). I love the plant, but it has no place in a mixed border. We only keep it in pots now and touch wood we have eradicated it from the garden.

The same applies to **Houttuynia Cordata**, which again is lovely in the right place but not in a mixed border. Because of composting it, bits of it found their way into the courtyard raised beds where it choked everything. We have not yet won the battle of getting rid of all of this, but we are on the way. We changed all the soil in the three courtyard beds and did not replant any of the old plants into these beds. We still have it in two other areas of the garden, but we are trying to stay on top of it.

The third invasive species that choked everything else off were some types of **Celandine** and other members of the Ranunculaceae family. We think they must have come in with some soil improver or courtesy of the birds. One of the leaves looks deceptively like Geum and we have been known to lovingly pot it up only to discover later in the season that it was not Geum. Hopefully, this is now gone from the courtyard, and we will just have to keep on top of it in the borders.

AND as if nature were getting back at us for ejecting her plants, bindweed has made an appearance for the first time in 20 years. Denis is on a new mission to get rid of it.

What and who has influenced our new planting and the new beds in Phase 1 and 2.

We had a new water meter fitted in 2019 and the first year was a bit of an eye opener in terms of the increase in our water bills. We wanted to create some spaces that were less reliant on supplementary watering.

We had visited Beth Chatto's Garden in Essex and then saw the Beth Chatto Trust exhibit at Hampton Court Flower Show in 2019. We were drawn to recreating a version of a drought garden. We had read quite a few different books and articles on the subject. In 2018 we had also visited Olivier Filippi's stunning Mediterranean garden in Sete, France. Like Beth Chatto his fantastic garden is planted with no watering in mind.

A further influence at this time was Jimi Blake from Huntingbrook in Co Wicklow, Ireland. Not so much in terms of the drought garden (Wicklow is probably the wettest place on earth) but in terms of planting some more exotic plants that are now in the long border.

Our remodelling took place in the late Autumn of 2019 (when the big willow was taken out and the ground was prepared for the spring). The serious work began as lock down started and was slightly frustrated by sourcing materials. In the end it turned out well as our great helpers Dan and Matt Smith ['Ace of Spades'] worked through lockdown, and with social distancing they were able to undertake tree removal, hard landscaping, and heavy jobs in the revamp. We are completely indebted to them and their 'can do' approach to whatever we asked them to do. Dan even came up with the sourcing of the stone circle when our original suppliers let us down. We got to do the nice bits of planning and planting.

The top bed required a huge amount of additional soil to get it level but was a lovely bed to plant and a few weeks after planting it had filled out and the hard landscaping was softened by the plants. We were too late to get sweet peas into this bed in 2020 so we were really looking forward to how this would look in 2021 and were not disappointed. We have kept the colour palette simple in this bed with pink, purple, white and cream.

The lower bed (the gravel bed) has been successful and plants that we have struggled with in the past, like Monarda, have thrived.

THE BIG REVAMP PHASE 2

2021/22

Our long border had become increasingly difficult to manage with climbers (and bindweed!) on the fence and being so deep we could not easily access it for maintenance. It has been a hard, but good, lesson learnt about making borders narrow enough to be maintained from the front, or if the borders are wide, then allowing access from both sides. In October 2021, Aideen attended a garden design course at The Garden House in Brighton, and this really helped hone down our plans to revamp the long border. As mentioned in phase 1 above there were invasive plants in this area so painstaking clearance of the roots dominated the autumn before other work could begin. We had always had poor results from growing climbers on our fence, partly because the other side is a concrete path and the source of many unwanted weeds. However, the fence was not very pleasing to the eye without anything on it. We have constructed the new slatted fence within the other fence, which we think is more aesthetically pleasing and won't need anything growing up it. We painted and left the old fence behind it to provide extra protection from the howling winds that come up the twitten behind.

The hottest and sunniest part of the garden is the top of the long border, so we have chosen Musa, Canna, Gingers, and other more exotic plants for this bed. Further down we have more traditional hardy perennial planting around a structure provided by Olive, Callistemon, Cardoon, Holly, and grasses. We have created two new seating areas in the border so hopefully you will enjoy sitting amongst the plants and wildlife while you relax with tea and cake.

We have only used a few of the old plants in the revamped border and most plants have been either grown by us or bought from our three favourite nurseries. These are: locally from Pelham Plants in Laughton mail order from Beth Chatto in Essex and mail order from Elizabeth McGregor in Scotland.

Other projects undertaken in 2021/21 were the replacement of the big shed, which finally succumbed to woodworm: the new one has been painted to tie in with the rest of the garden buildings; a revamp of the rose bed; and the wooden gazebo was dismantled and built back up again. The wooden floor had rotted after 15 years - imagine our delight when Dan uncovered a lovely brick circle underneath!

THE BIG REVAMP PHASE 3 – 2022/2023

Winter/Spring bed

This was probably the biggest job we have undertaken in all the years we have been here. This was the largest plant and shrub bed in the garden, behind the kitchen, and difficult to access and maintain without risking damage to plants. Dan and Matt created these new paths to dissect the bed into four sections, which are much easier to maintain. Whilst this was all dug up we were able to add in the pipework for an extra outside tap, which really helps keep the plant sale area hydrated. There are a huge number of bulbs replanted in this area and we copied a great idea from Shirley (who opens her beautiful garden at 5 Whiteman's Close, Cuckfield) of planting our snowdrops in baskets. This really helps in terms of now digging them up accidentally and is great when it comes time to split clumps. We have gradually added shrubs, aconitum, allium, anemones, and species tulips to these beds.

The Deck

The deck outside our kitchen and sitting room had started to rot again and was lethal in the winter in terms of slips and falls. We decided to go for a more permanent solution to these problems by replacing it with Italian porcelain tiles. It was a major construction job as the whole area had to be raised so that we didn't create steps into the house. We decided not to have pots on the new deck so created a lower platform out of a shrub bed. This is where we now have pots that can easily be replaced to have something in flower throughout the year.

We decided to close the garden for NGS events in 2023. Aideen hit the 70 milestone late in 2022 and we also celebrated 50 years together. We decided we wanted to travel and visit gardens, so we just opened for plant sales when we were back in the country. We embarked on our "Gap Year" in 2023. I had set myself a goal of 70 gardens while I was 70 in 7 countries. We achieved this and more and had an amazing year while checking back with Dan and his lovely team who were carrying out all the hard landscaping.

The Big Revamp – Phase 4 and hopefully the final major work – 2023/24

Cutting Garden

The raised wooden beds in this area had started to fall apart and were difficult to manage with narrow pathways. On our travels we had seen cow troughs being used as planters and liked the idea of having some of these at a raised height to make planting easier for the future. Our original plan was to put 3 in, but when we sited them they didn't look great, so we have bricked the whole area and built plinths

for just two of them. Our plan is to keep them seasonally planted and to have somewhere to put our large collection of succulents in the summer months. This also creates a bigger seating area. We have taken out the metal structure that originally divided this area from the courtyard. We hope by opening this area up it gives a better flow to the garden. The third planter has been added to the area outside the summer house.

We are indebted to our lovely friend Charlie who helped us through the last year with the endless painting, clearing jobs and gardening jobs.

Compost bins

These had been built in 2012 and were starting to fall apart. Dan has rebuilt them all, a tricky job that required moving compost from one bin to another.

What's Next?

Not much, we hope! The bottom deck in the plant sale area has started to rot so some repairs in the autumn. Some of the brick paths are sinking so will just need a bit of remedial work again in the autumn. Then the usual tweaking of planted areas.

Plant sales and final comments –

We start these in April of each year and continue them until August. If you want to hear about them, you can be added to our mailing list. We are always happy to take plant pots and labels back to recycle them and cut down our use of one-time plastic.

In 2024 we are opening as part of the NGS Seaford Gardens trails but not providing tea and cake (this is available elsewhere on the trail). We are also opening in May with Lavender Cottage in Seaford, but this event must be pre booked. However, we will still be doing private booking that can include lunch or tea and cake. Minimum of 6 and a maximum of 20 per visit. If you have a special birthday and want to invite some friends, we can supply a birthday cake too.

We hope our revamp provides interest for visitors who have seen the garden in its various incarnations and to new visitors seeing it for the first time.

Aideen & Denis Jones

February 2024

Below is a list of suppliers, trades people and nurseries that we use and recommend:

Dan Smith, Ace of Spades - <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100024703242320>

Beth Chatto- on line nursery - <https://www.bethchatto.co.uk/>

Olivier Fillipi- blogs and other information - <https://www.jardin-sec.com/>

Jimi Blake, Huntingbrook - daily information on planting and on line courses - <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Landmark---Historical-Place/HUNTING-BROOK-GARDENS-326862913473/>

James Ridgen, Treefella – tree surgery and disposal of green waste
<http://sussextreefella.co.uk/>

Pelham Plants – superb nursery near Laughton - <https://pelhamplants.co.uk/nursery/>

Staverton nursery - <http://www.stavertonnursery.co.uk/>

Elizabeth MacGregor nurseries <https://www.elizabethmacgregornursery.co.uk/>

KPS – compost, top soil - <https://www.kps.uk.com/>

Twelve Nuns Nursery – Hartington gingers - <https://www.twelvenunns.co.uk/nursery/>

Marchant's Hardy Plants, Laughton - <https://www.marchantshardyplants.co.uk/>

The Garden House, Brighton www.gardenhousebrighton.co.uk