

BROOK LODGE; a developing garden.

Brook Lodge is an early Edwardian House with some 12 acres of grounds and a mile of River frontage. But 8 acres of the garden floods regularly and when purchased by Richard and Sarah Wilson in 2006 had been neglected and unloved for many years. A huge bank of English Laurels hid the stream which had long since silted up, whilst the extensive collection of trees had been unmanaged, with willows laying cracked and fallen across the grounds and waterways.

Unphased, Richard and Sarah bought a chain saw and started to clear and dredge the stream. In doing so, in a classic 'Heligan' moment, they unearthed the causeway that barges would have been towed along, up to the nearby Water Mill, where corn would have been milled.



With a tennis court & swimming pool installed, willows now pollarded and hundreds of tonnes of dredgings to deal with, inspiration was needed.

Having previously created much of the adjacent gardens of Brook House, Rob Jones of The Garden Design Company Ltd introduced international garden designer Dan Pearson and his colleague Peter Beardsley to the project. Dan is renowned for his sympathetic designs where nature and the wider landscape form an essential part of the design. By Spring 2008, Dan and Peter had created an extensive concept plan which highlighted the different zones in the garden, created circulation routes and enabled Richard and Sarah to see the way forward.



Extensive grading and levelling of the meadows then took place, with the dredgings being used to help restore the North Meadow which after being used as a paddock had deteriorated into nothing more than 5 acres of tussocks of uneven coarse grass with little wildlife value. Existing vegetation was sprayed off in an attempt to ensure that the wild flowers later to be sown would not be drowned out by more competitive perennial weeds and established grasses. The woodland was thinned to enable the remaining trees to thrive and more light through, whilst the Roman Pond was restored, a feature which can now be enjoyed by walkers and villagers alike as they use the adjacent Thames Path.

Meanwhile a hardcore based service road dressed with 25mm of soil and wild flower grass seed mixture provided a solid means of access to the boathouse and beyond even during the wettest conditions for before this access was impassable for much of the year, as the area was so prone to flooding.

A specialist Wetland meadow Wild Flower Mixture was sown over the South Meadow in June 2008, with a shady hedgerow mix down under the Horse Chestnuts near the river and under the woodland area leading down to the boathouse, with the larger North Meadow left fallow to see what unwanted weeds would germinate from the natural seed bank, which had been left undisturbed under the paddock for so many years. Meanwhile a pond edge mixture was sown on the banks of the stream to stabilise the latter, and cope with the moist conditions.



South Meadow Preparation June 2008



North Meadow Grading

August 2008 revealed a disaster, as a huge flush of deep rooted thistles erupted from the South Meadow such that much of this has to be sprayed off and resown in September 2008. At the same time an annual meadow of poppies, corncockles and cornflowers was sown near the Roman Pond to provide an annual hit of colour from flowers that were once so common around the edge of farmers fields.



Annual Meadow 2009

Meanwhile a bridge was installed between the North and South Meadow to re-establish a crucial link in Dans' proposed circulation routes, so that the garden can be enjoyed as part of a journey.

February 2009 saw several thousand English bluebells, snowdrops and Summer snowflakes being planted 'in the green,' together with mixed native hedgerow plants along the gardens boundaries.

Relatively little regrowth of unwanted weeds was experienced in the North Meadow that had been left fallow over winter, the frosts having helped break down the clods of soil to create a fine tilth, such that the North Meadow was sown in May 2009 with 12kilos of wild flower seed for wetland meadows.



Drought of 2009

Disaster Nos 2 struck when the rain failed and all that germinated was a dense sward of Spear Leaved Orache, so dense that it stopped any light from reaching the few wild flowers that were thinking of germinating. To this day no one knows where this had come from. Steps were taken to stop the Orache from germinating by cutting, and fingers were crossed that the ungerminated wild flower seed would remain viable.



The Boat House June 2009



North Meadow 2010

Spring 2010 proved to be a revelation, as the seed germinated in the North Meadow without any sign of the Orache. Docks however appeared. The ultimate enemy of wild flower meadows, each plant can produce 50,000 seeds which can remain dormant for 80 years. 1 years docks....But the relatively unknown tiny Dock Beetle arrived to devour the docks. They devour Rhubarb as well, but it's a small price to pay.

As the wider landscape took shape more formal plantings were planned closer to the house. With planting detail and advice being provided by Elaine Wylie, herbaceous plantings and walls of box were created in 2008/2009 between the house and family entertainment area centred around the pool and tennis court echoing Dan's concept plan.

At the same time a grove of fast growing and fragrant Poplars were planted in the North Meadow, and later a coppice and a nuttery. In addition with advice from The Heritage Fruit Tree Company an Orchard featuring apple trees that are in decline in this area of Oxfordshire were planted together with a Quince, Victoria Plum and a Pear.

The enormous upheavals outside did not stop Sarah & Richard embarking on a significant extension and restoration project of Brook Lodge itself in 2009/2010. Designed by architect Matthew Wilson, extensive meetings had taken place between him, the clients and Dan Pearson back in 2008, so that when finally created, the outdoor room fitted seamlessly with the newly restored Brook Lodge. Site lines now flow not only in the garden but also through the house to the outside, such that the house and garden site comfortably and frankly majestically.

With the extension now finished, attention has recently turned to implementing the front garden layout and potager, reflecting the increased interest in growing your own.

Whilst the gardens at Brook Lodge represent an ongoing project, they illustrate how with good planning and design, a large plot does not have to be overwhelming. In addition and most crucially the end result can blend, compliment and add to the very unique wider landscape that is otherwise so very much under threat. Enjoy.

For More Information please visit;

Garden Designer; Dan Pearson www.danpearsonstudio.com

Contractor; The Garden Design Company Ltd www.gardendesignco.co.uk, or telephone Rob Jones on 07973 261852

Wild Flower seed supplier; Emmorsgate Wild Flower Seeds. www.wildseed.co.uk

Garden Advisor; Elaine Wylie ,The Garden Advisor, 07762 838168 elainewylie@yahoo.co.uk

Architect; Matthew Young 01491 681268 (mtyoung_arch@hotmail.com)

Fruit tree Supplier; The Heritage Fruit Tree Company 01295 810516

Seed Mixes

Wetland mix

Yarrow, Betony, Common Knapweed Meadowsweet Lady's Bedstraw Oxeye Daisy Birdsfoot Trefoil Ribwort Plantain Cowslip Selfheal Meadow Buttercup Yellow Rattle Common Sorrel Great Burnet Pepper Saxifrage Ragged Robin Devil's-bit Scabious Tufted Vetch

Hedgerow Mix

Yarrow Agrimony Garlic Mustard Common Knapweed Wild Basil Hedge Bedstraw Wood Avens Oxeye Daisy Ribwort Plantain Cowslip Selfheal Red Campion Bladder Campion Hedge Woundwort Upright Hedge-parsley Tufted Vetch

Pond Edge Mixture

Sneezewort Wild Angelica Marsh Marigold Hemp Agrimony Meadowsweet Water Avens Square-stalked St John's Wort Yellow Iris Greater Birdsfoot Trefoil Purple Loosestrife Common Fleabane Meadow Buttercup Water Figwort Ragged Robin Devil's-bit Scabious Common Meadow-rue Tufted Vetch

Annual Cornflower Mixture

Corn Cockle Corn Chamomile Cornflower Corn Marigold Field Forget-me-not Common Poppy Corn Buttercup Night-flowering Catchfly

