

Proposed Orchard Restoration and Associated Building and Landscaping Works

at

Church Gardens

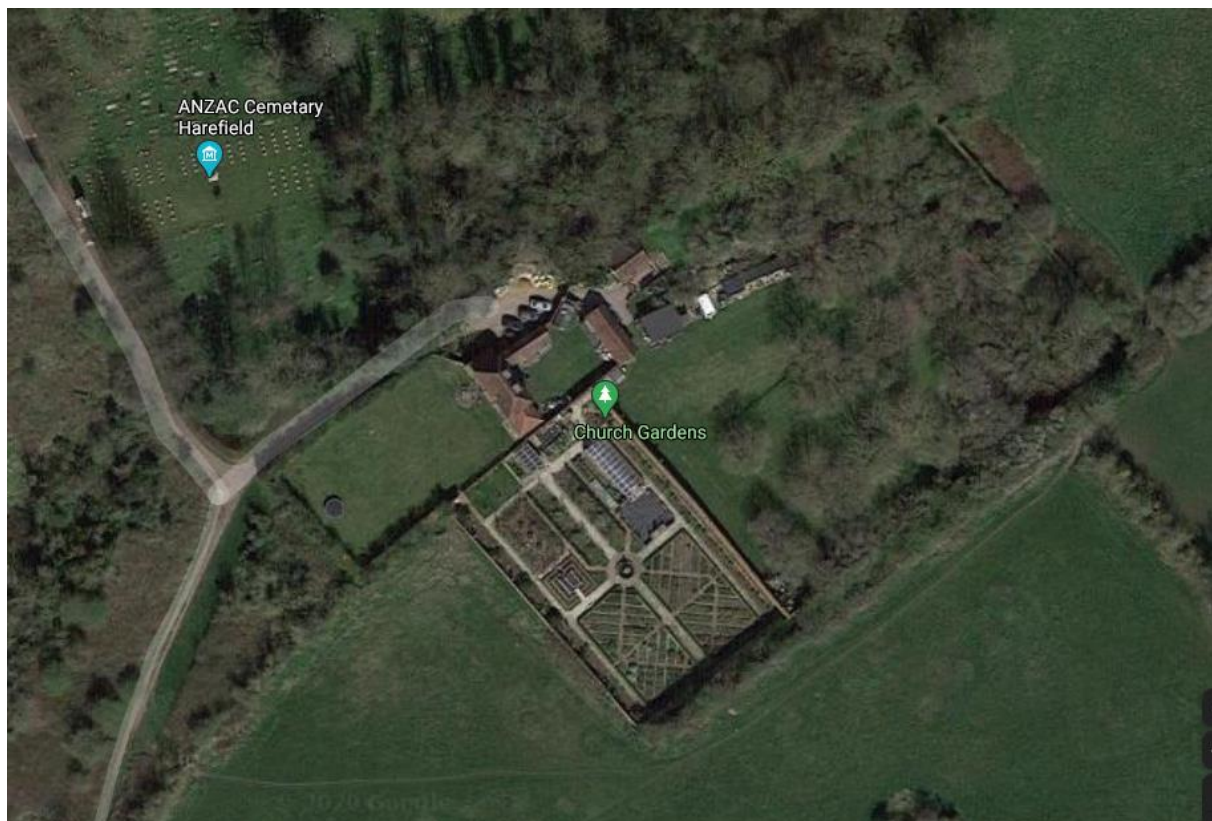
Church Hill

Harefield

UB9 6DU

By

Kay and Patrick McHugh



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Introduction

This statement is prepared in support of an Application for Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent for planned restoration works to the Orchard Garden area of Church Gardens together with associated building, landscaping and external works. These proposed works are the final phase of the restorations at Church Gardens which began in 1996 when we purchased the property. The property is Grade II Listed and at that time it was in a serious state of dereliction and both the principle building, now our family dwelling house, and the extensive gardens were (and still are) on the London Borough of Hillingdon At Risk Register of Historic Properties.

Church Gardens is the only remaining element of the Harefield Place Estate now in existence, following the demolition of the Manor House itself in 1813. The property comprised of a simple two storey building, originally the Coach House, various outbuildings set amidst three acres of walled gardens, originally the Kitchen Garden and Orchard to the Manor House.

After purchasing Church Gardens in 1996, it took two and a half years to make the house habitable and we eventually moved in with our young family in September 1998. We have spent the last 25 years, gradually clearing and restoring the gardens back to some semblance of it's former glory, as and when time and personal funds would permit. To date, we have not received any financial support towards this project.

In 2018, we opened the gardens to the public via the National Garden Scheme for the first time and received an overwhelmingly positive response from our visitors. We continued opening the garden to the public in 2019 (three Public Open Days and various small visits of Horticultural Societies and U3A groups) and to date, have had over 2000 visitors. We were destined to have an even more successful year in 2020, but sadly, due to Covid-19, we have not been able to open the gardens at all.

The Covid-19 crisis has dramatically affected our family situation, we have been shielding three vulnerable people throughout this period, two of which are elderly relations requiring full time care. Our work position has also been drastically impacted on, Kay's work as a professional musician and teacher has all but ceased and two of our daughters, recently graduated from a Music Conservatoire and a Drama Degree are unemployed and are likely to be for some time.

However, the feedback that we have already received from previous visitors has assured us that with Church Gardens, we have something very special and very positive to share with our local community and beyond. We have not only undertaken the restoration of a historic building but have also developed the gardens as an exemplary sustainability project that offers inspiration and education to a wide range of people. Despite the Covid-19 crisis, the growing level of interest in our project has reinforced our wish to continue to open up Church Gardens to the Public with the full involvement of the family as a whole. We are therefore anxious to press on with the restoration of the Orchard area, together with the installation of facilities that will enable us to accommodate visitors on a more regular basis and guarantee a more stable future for both ourselves and the gardens.

The proposed works now planned involve the complete repair and restoration of the brick walls surrounding the Orchard garden, together with the reinstatement of original landscape features. It is also proposed to install a natural pond within the orchard and to remove a range of unsightly outbuildings that date from the 1960's when this property was last in use as a small-holding. In order to accommodate visitors and groups it is proposed to erect a new outbuilding that will serve as a tearoom and meeting space, which to date, we have had to accommodate under temporary marquees and in our home in bad weather.

Proposed Orchard Restoration and Associated Works at Church Gardens

Wall Restoration – Arcaded Wall

Within our Application we are requesting permission to repair and rebuild the walls to the Orchard Garden. To date, we have only been able to carry out basic clearance and maintenance work to these walls as the necessary repairs involved to restore them to their original condition are very extensive. We are providing a full Schedule of Works on these within our Planning Submission. This Schedule has been prepared with the experience and knowledge gained over the past years in repairing and restoring the walls to the Kitchen Garden area, all of which have now been successfully implemented to a high standard using a local experienced bricklayer.



Arcaded Wall in 2014, before basic tree growth removal work was carried out



Arcaded wall in 2020

Wall Restoration – Eastern Orchard Wall



Eastern Orchard Wall in 2004 with temporary supports



Southern Orchard Wall in 2020

Installation of Natural Pond in Orchard Garden

Since we first arrived at Church Gardens, nearly 25 years ago, we have always wanted to place a reasonably sized pond at the end of the water channel/sluiice in the orchard. It is mentioned in the Conservation Plan because there is some argument to suggest that some sort of pond may have been situated in this position in the past; “The ground form, especially evident in times of flooding, suggests there may have been a pond at the west end of the stream”¹. There are still three, large, interlinked ponds behind St Mary’s Church, which comprise part of the original Harefield Place estate and The Royal Commission Survey 1997 identified two further sites of ponds (no longer in existence) in the field behind the orchard, one would have been directly behind where the water from the interlinked ponds is directed into the channel running through the Orchard.

The West end of the stream floods in times of high winter rainfall and can reach the base of the West garden wall, threatening its stability.² In the past, this flooding has caused water to flood into the Kitchen Garden and destroy planting and buildings. It has also caused damage to both the East and West facing walls in the Orchard due to water building up against it. We are keen to avoid any further damage to the Walls and Kitchen Garden, considering that we have invested a great deal of time, effort and money (in excess of £120,000) into repairing and rebuilding them (which well exceeds our statutory obligations) over the past 25 years and would therefore like to design a pond to help regulate water flow and reinstate the channel in the orchard so that it flows all year round. A well-maintained pond and sluice will help to control water in high rain-flow, protecting the West wall.

We are proposing a natural pond, that will only start at the end section of the central channel by the outlet pipe, leaving the previous section of straight channel intact. We feel this design will preserve the character of the ‘valley like’ design of the garden with central channel that is one of the remaining renaissance features of the garden. The pond will be no deeper than 1.5m in its central area which the shape of the ground lends itself to. It will be constructed using a liner, with minimum excavation and therefore could be regarded as reversible. The proposed position of the pond is at the furthest end of the channel in an area of blank grass. It will not disrupt the channel to any great degree or significantly alter the appearance and land form. It will also have little impact on views of, or from, the arcaded wall. Also, the walk around the perimeter of the orchard will not be disturbed. This will be a roughly circular pond which will be neither overly naturalistic or formal. However, the design of the remaining pond (behind the church) is quite naturalistic which is perfectly in keeping with landscaping ideas of the time, which was a constant evocation of Arcadia – the late Renaissance pastoral style.

¹ Rutherford, Dr Sarah. Effects of Mr and Mrs McHugh’s Proposals on the Historic Environment of the Church Gardens Walled Garden, 2020, pg 1

² Rutherford, Dr Sarah. Effects of Mr and Mrs McHugh’s Proposals on the Historic Environment of the Church Gardens Walled Garden, 2020, pg 2



Small scale Winter flooding in the Orchard 2005



Medium scale Winter flooding Orchard – Build up against repaired West Orchard wall

Proposed Outbuilding

Our ideas and plans for this building have evolved considerably since we initially sought pre-application advice from Hillingdon Planning and Historic England in 2017. Initially, we were applying for a games room which we had proposed to situate in the raised terrace to the rear of the garage building and would have been completely concealed below ground. However, following assessment of that proposal by our Archaeological and Historic Environment Consultants, it was considered that an above ground building would be more appropriate, preferably incorporated into the existing group of out-buildings around the entrance to the property.

The function of the building we are now proposing is to accommodate visitors to the garden (meetings, talks, events, refreshment space). Since a very successful first opening to the public on August Bank Holiday 2018 for the National Garden Scheme, when more than 500 people attended, we have continued to open the gardens for three further Open days and group visits throughout 2019. These events have proved very popular with all types of 'special interest' societies and U3A groups. We have now had over two thousand people visit the garden and our reputation is growing in the local and wider community where we enjoy warm support. Many of our visitors return for repeat visits and recommend us highly to new organisations. We have been featured in several national magazines, including 'English Garden' and 'Kitchen Garden'.

We have therefore realised the potential of our beautiful garden to at least partially contribute some funds to its own up keep and restoration. We had already received numerous bookings for 2020 which have sadly been arrested by the onset of Covid-19. We are a very reasonably priced attraction and therefore particularly popular with elderly and disabled visitors. It is for this reason that we would like to create an inside space for our visitors to serve refreshments and congregate for teas, talks/performances, particularly in inclement weather. This would also give us the space to provide an excellent disabled toilet facility. We believe it is essential to open up our unique historical garden to be viewed by a wider audience and the positive reaction to this thus far has been heart-warming. We also feel Church Gardens has the potential to be very beneficial addition to the overall community of Harefield and it will bring visitors to St Mary's Church, The Anzac Cemetery and the Village itself, which will be very welcome particularly in the present climate.

If this new building is permitted, we would then remove a length of ugly concrete sheds that extend much further into the orchard and sight lines of the historic arcade and terrace. These buildings however, presently provide essential covered storage space for tools, equipment, materials and garden furniture that are needed for the continuing operation, maintenance and upkeep of the gardens. These buildings have been constructed with both suspended and ground-bearing concrete floor slabs that appear to have been laid on the original ground, their removal should therefore not result in any disturbance to the original landscape. The footprint of these buildings we then be re-grassed to link back into the terracing behind.

We really want to remove these buildings to the benefit of the Orchard as a whole and to enable us to give up this space, we are proposing to incorporate a basement level under the events building to accommodate our storage needs. These needs should not be underestimated as there is a great deal involved in maintaining three acres of grounds, throughout all seasons. Should the upstairs space need to be cleared for a talk or meeting, this basement level would also provide us with somewhere to store internal furniture, giving much greater flexibility of use. The basement level structure will be completely concealed below ground. As with all previous excavations works within the property, we would anticipate that a Watching Brief will be in place whilst works are carried out.

It should be noted that the footprint area of the building we are proposing, was occupied previously by a monstrous derelict asbestos barn and other low level sheds. All past excavations in this area for the garage, workshop and annexe buildings have been accompanied by a watching archaeological brief which have never revealed anything significant. Therefore, we believe that the suggested site of this new building should not have the potential to cause significant harm. The building would be at some distance from the historically sensitive arcade and included amongst a group of ad-hoc service structures already in existence. Thus, the setting of the arcade and terrace would be considerably improved. It should be noted that although the original asbestos barn has been removed, the footprint of the new building presently contains a section of ruined concrete out buildings, a chicken house and enclosed chicken run. The new building will be sensitively designed to fit in with the existing newer built structures and will provide a much improved outlook from the terrace than at present.



Existing asbestos shed and rubbish pile on planned site of the Proposed Outbuilding, already cleared



The line of concrete, derelict sheds that will be removed to open up the view of the Arcaded Wall



The view of the hardcore pile to be removed to open up the view of the Arcaded Wall

Proposed House Extension

This proposed extension is a very modest addition to the existing Music Room and is merely designed to provide some much needed safe and secure storage for instruments and music. Kay is a musician and music teacher and all three of our children also play instruments with the youngest just recently completing a degree in Music on the Harp at Guildhall this year with the intention of becoming a professional player. All of this means many instruments, including a piano and two harps to accommodate, together with a large amount of Music in a relatively small space, whilst leaving room to carry out private teaching.

The need for this additional storage is therefore very pressing in these current times and the extension has been designed merely to add an extra 1.5m to the existing structure and bring it line with the end of the existing garden wall. The extension will replicate the form of the existing building in external appearance and form and will have minimal visual impact.



View to area for proposed extension

Completed works



Aerial view of Kitchen Garden 2018

We are acutely aware of the historical importance of Church Gardens and have undertaken its restoration as our very own lifetime project. To date, it has absorbed a vast amount of our personal time and money, but as far as we are concerned, it has all been extremely worthwhile and rewarding in every aspect. The praise and respect that we are now receiving from many quarters is much appreciated and very encouraging. We therefore hope our safe stewardship of this valuable heritage asset is recognised and that we can be trusted to continue to work at Church Gardens with the interest of the property itself primarily at heart. This is very much a 'labour of love' project and could never be described as a 'for profit' venture. It is our intention that we will pass on Church Gardens to our children and that they will continue to retain it within family ownership with continuing public access for many years to come.

All of the works carried out to date have largely been completed by ourselves, with some input from specialist brick layers etc. Works have been completed to a very high standard, both in terms of design and implementation. Please see Schedule below.

Schedule of Completed Works

2000 - The Front Field



The front field in 2000, wild and overgrown

We created a terrace to run along the length of the grand arched facing wall, a reference to the terrace and arcaded wall in the orchard. Then, we built a small patio and steps in the terrace, levelled and rotavated the field and seeded it with grass.



2002 - The Kitchen Garden



The Kitchen Garden in 2002, wild and overgrown

The Kitchen Garden was not only completely overgrown and wild, but it was also home to three derelict glasshouses and two wrecked polytunnels. One of the glasshouses was leaning badly having been hit by flood water escaping from the orchard years previously.



The Glasshouse in the Kitchen Garden in 2002, damaged by flood water escaping from the Orchard

Gradually, we cleared the land and covered the ground with a weed suppressing membrane to kill off perennial weed growth



The Kitchen Garden in 2003, cleared

2004 - The Orchard



The Orchard in 2004, wild and overgrown



The Orchard in 2020, cleared

2004 - The Polytunnel



2004 - The Vegetable Garden



We constructed 56 raised beds in a geometric pattern in keeping with Kitchen Gardens of the Tudor Period

2009 - The Paths in the Kitchen Garden



The paths were completed in the summer of 2016.

2011 – Wall Restoration in the Kitchen Garden



The Eastern Wall of the Kitchen Garden in 2011

In October 2011 we celebrated our first wall restoration being completed at a total cost of £60,000.



The Eastern Wall under construction

2012 – Solar Panels

There has always been an environmental consideration to our restoration work at Church gardens and in 2012 we installed Solar Panels and a Rain Water Harvesting System.



2014 – Continued Wall Restoration in Kitchen Garden



The Western Wall of the Kitchen Garden in 2014



The Nothern Wall of the Kitchen Garden in 2011

In 2014, all walls of the Kitchen Garden had been repaired and the effect was transformative, it finally felt like a 'Walled Garden'.



2015 – The beginning of Decorative Gardening

The Herbaceous Borders



2016 – The Herb Garden



2017 – The Alpine Garden



2018 – The Pond



2018 – NGS Garden Open Day

On our first public Open Day, over 450 enthusiastic people came to see Church Gardens and we raised about £3000 to donate to the National Garden Scheme Charity.



2019 –Continuing with Decorative gardening The Auricula Theatre



2019 – The Fruit Cage



2019 – The Polytunnel



2019 – The Paradise Garden



2020 – Orchard Tree Removal

In 2020, we were granted permission to remove trees in the orchard, as recommended by our Conservation Plan. Firstly, the trees running across the Renaissance Terrace in front of the Arcaded Wall, and secondly, the trees running along the North Facing Wall in the Orchard. We were then granted permission for the Council to carry out clearance work on top of the Arcaded Wall, to prevent further damage and to reinstate the walkway along the top of the wall.



The Arcaded Wall in the Orchard, 2020, after tree removal work was completed



The Southern Boundary Wall in the Orchard, 2020, with trees cleared and minor repairs underway