

LAUGHTER OVER THE HEDGE

by TONY VENISON



THE gardens at Hazelbury Manor, in Wiltshire, are as remarkable as their dynamic owner, Mr I. D. Pollard. Within 18 years of purchasing the property in a dilapidated state, he has repaired and transformed its complex Tudor house, and created a mature, individualistic garden from a site of disheartening dereliction reaching across eight acres.

Cars turning in from an undulating switchback lane through the Wiltshire countryside, close to the village of Chapel Plaister, dip down a drive into a deep bowl of land, in which the buildings and gardens nestle at the end of a green, fertile coomb.

Tractors, like beetles on the steep hill-sides now deftly reshaped in places by Mr Pollard, may be mowing in the new arbo-retum which will occupy many of the estate's 186 acres; or they may be shifting stone and soil in preparation for yet another of Mr Pollard's many and sometimes eccentric projects. Already there is a Wood Henge, and a "Stonehenge" where, instead of stones, yews stand in the precisely calculated formation of the stones of the real Stonehenge not many miles distant.

The history and architectural features of the house were chronicled in two articles in COUNTRY LIFE on February 20 and 27, 1926. Now it is not only Mr Pollard's home, but the dowerhouse serves his architectural

Raised beds overflowing with rock plants, springtime bulbs and shrubs in the courtyard of the Dower House at Hazelbury Manor, Wiltshire

design and development company. When the COUNTRY LIFE articles were published, Mr Kidston had recently spent £450,000 on rescuing the house and gardens from the derelict condition into which they had lapsed before he bought them in 1919. The manor house was built, in about 1480, of Bath-type stone from the nearby quarry, which for centuries made the name of Hazelbury well known.

But Mr Kidston discovered that the farmer who tenanted the house until ousted by him, had "quarried" any stone he needed for his pigsties and cowsheds from the walls of the house itself. As the present owner tells visitors: "Mr Kidston, who was a merchant banker and former ambassador, had a nice approach. To obtain new stone, he bought back the quarry which, long ago, had been sold off from the estate. To ensure new English oak beams for the house were of the right quality, he purchased a timber company, and then a haulage company to carry the timber and other goods to Hazelbury."

Much of his work, however, was in vain, for during the Second World War Hazelbury again experienced hard times. From

1943 to 1971 it was a girls' finishing school. That almost finished the garden.

Almost everything in the photographs illustrating this article has been created by Mr Pollard since 1973. The garden is filled with hidden corners, surprises around high hedges, vistas, spectacles and inventiveness.

There are four gardeners (Mr Kidston kept 18), and the gardens mirror the layout of the house in extending from room to room, enclosure following hedged or walled enclosure in a complexity which involves any stroller in back-tracking and diving along unexpected vistas.

Mr Pollard's assets on the site were the terraces and the "bones" of the Step Gardens, one or two beech and yew hedges and some totally outgrown topiary planted by Mr Kidston in 1925. The soil was perhaps the greatest asset, for it is enviably fertile, overlying brash or broken rock. It is this soil and the fertiliser and humus that are put into it which have enabled new yew hedges to grow to 8ft tall in only seven or eight years.

The garden's oldest feature is the Archer's Walk, with a teller's seat in the stone wall which extends along one side of it. Its length of 40 paces is that prescribed for crossbow tournaments, which were fashionable during the mid 16th century. This Walk dates from that period. The teller would have kept score, and directed the aim of archers at practice.

Today the Walk is lined with standard roses standing behind lavender. Clematis scramble up the wall, which has *Iris unguicularis* along its foot. On the opposite side of the Walk, behind the standard roses, is a colonnade of *Juniperus* Skyrocket and the pillar-like, pink Japanese cherry *Amanogawa*. This unexpected combination typifies the originality of Hazelbury's plant groupings.

It is typical, too, that the Archer's Walk leads off a pair of iron gates from one of the newest features. Here a semi-elliptical, raised pool is fed by water plashing from a wall fountain in a walled suntrap courtyard. New and old juxtapose repeatedly at Hazelbury. The courtyard serves as a secluded extension of the house.

One terrace down the hillside from the Archer's Walk and the centuries fall away again, for this area is the Mulberry Lawn. In the grass surrounding the ancient tree, spring bulbs have been massed. From here, steps lead one flight farther down the hillside to a croquet lawn whose walls here are half hidden beneath Virginia creeper.

Along the downhill end of the croquet lawn, a border along the top of a terrace wall holds shrubs, perennials and bulbs. These replace old trees tragically brought down by the hurricane in October 1987. Brunneras, epimediums, colchicums, hellebores, ornithogalums, crown imperials, cyclamens and heucheras are part of the adventurous mixture, selected to be happy in semi-shade.

Complete contrast, in Mr Pollard's characteristic manner, is at hand. Across the west drive the land dips into a grassy dell