

The Building of Sonning 2 by Edna Walling

The approach to Sonning.

Photos by Duncdn Wade

SOME years ago I wrote a little story about the building of Sonning entitled "The House That Jill Built." And now here is the story about the building of Sonning 2, for in the midst of winter the former cottage was burnt to the ground. All efforts to save the little cottage were unavailing against the fierce wind - all thought of the treasures within were temporarily forgotten in the anxiety for the little kitten who had been fast asleep on the top of a wardrobe. The kitten was saved by the presence of mind of a student who was with me at the time, and soon after everything else was gone.

With small prospect of sleep that night we decided to occupy our minds with the planning of a new cottage, and by 3 a.m. the plan was complete.

The building of it has not been so enthralling, nor so amusing as the first adventure, but it must be admitted there are compensations. Suffering in silence, my friends would not for worlds have mentioned the draughts and the smoke whilst Sonning still stood, but now that it was gone there was much consolation in the belief that the new plan would eliminate these small matters! Here is a passage in the letter of a friend at present in London, for instance:-

"... You will be much more comfortable in your new home, but I shall never be able to visualise anything but gorgeous, uncomfortable, smoky, adorable little Sonning."

Sonning 2 is complete, and it is much the same in its outward appearance except for an added respectability, which I secretly regret. However, as the years advance, one is apt to drop the romantic for the com-

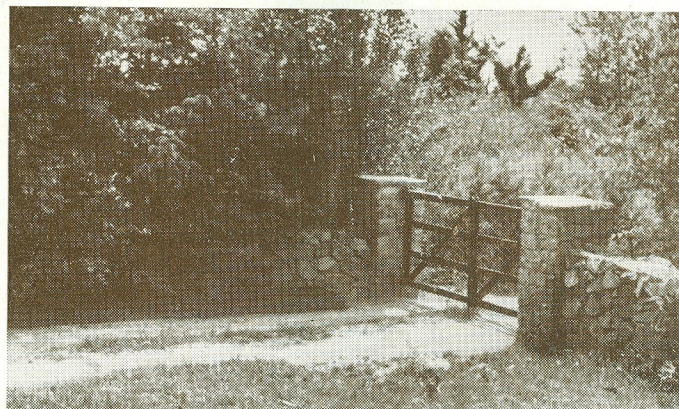
fortable, perhaps, and so there stands now a cottage with sufficient "mod. cons." to satisfy the most fastidious housewife, and soon a Fortunes Yellow will once again be clambering over the stone chimney, and shrubs to soften the walls are already in place.

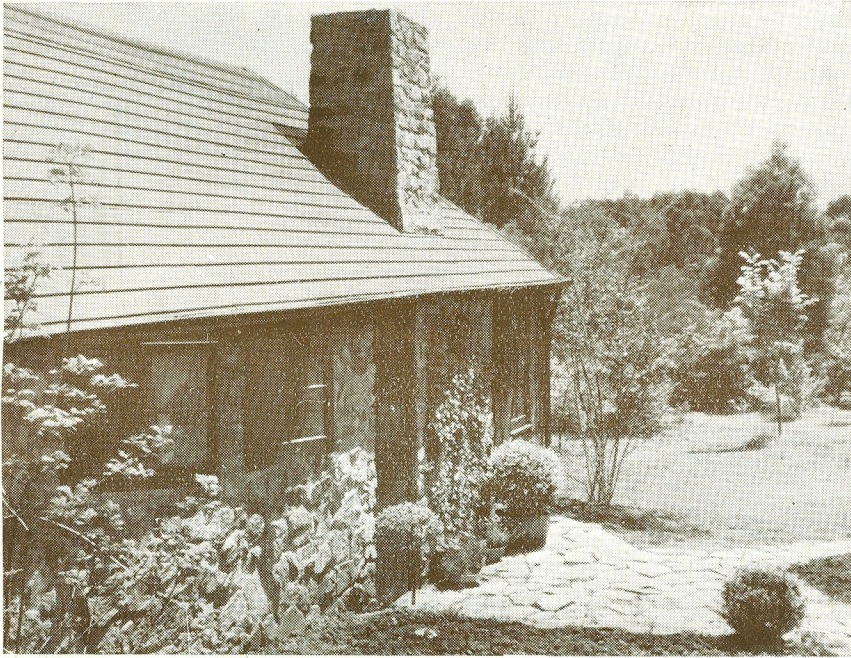
Some sections of the old stone walls that are clothed with a small-leaved ivy which escaped the fire, have been carefully preserved, by reinforcing them with concrete pillars inside, and one section that was very shaky now forms the outside wall of a chimney, which has made it quite solid again. There is a great deal more stone work in the new cottage than in the old, one short section of the walls only now being of wood and another section is stone half-way up, and then timber.

The stone walls are plastered inside-I think the nearest description of the finish would be "undulating!" They undulate to a most disconcerting degree in spots, but it is better than a meticulously flat surface, and at least I only have myself to blame.

The wall with a wooden frame has been lined with fibrous plaster sheets, used back to front, joined up with plaster, of course, not those conventional strips that look so dreadful in an unconventional structure. The first time I

used these plaster sheets with the finished surface inside, in one of the cottages on the Bickleigh Vale Village scheme, the manufacturer was horrified at the bare suggestion, and applied every argument to persuade me to change my mind, and his last card - but it was not a trump - was "they'll catch the germs." The thought of these acrobatic





The path to the back door.

little fellows doing stunts on my walls so tickled me that the slight trepidation that I must confess I felt at the experiment, departed, and the plaster went up back to front. About six months later another cottage was built, and the same manufacturer was called in to do the lining. One of the first things he asked was, "Would you like the random finish?" Somewhat mystified, I asked for a description, and was informed that this neON rough finish was produced by using the sheets back to front. One does forget in six months!

As the walls are low it was necessary to have either cove ceilings or line the rafters right up to the ridge. We adopted the latter course with quite satisfactory results. Where more than one room is beneath the span of the roof it is necessary to use false rafters on one side, to give an even angle to the ceiling, and to bring the centre of the ceiling to the centre of the room.

The living-room and bedroom floors are of 5!in. hard"Nood. I am inclined to think that 'the wider boards are more cottage-like' than the narrow ones, and they come out a little cheaper, needing less labor in the laying. The kitchen floor is of stone, which makes a quaint picture from the entrance hall, and the bathroom floor is of odd-sized fire-bricks, the largest of which are 19 inches by 18, and the smallest 4in. by tin. This floor is easily scrubbed, and the color is most pleasing, toning in well with the deep cream bath and the primrose walls. An old fireplace has been turned into a seat, in which the bath chips for the bath heater are kept.

The seat covers the old hearth, and above it in the recess of the fireplace there is now a little cupboard for all the odds and ends that have their place in the bathroom. The front of the seat is made of two large firebricks, and the seat of heavy timber.

All the windows are of seasoned hardwood, with glazing bars that are bevelled to the edge. These are much easier to keep free from dust than those with mouldings that have grooves in them. Like all the rest of the "Nood-work, they have been creosoted brown. I find this the cheapest and most satisfactory stain for hardwood. I have found that red pine is one of the worst woods to deal with. Whatever you do, it either becomes too dark in color or brings up the red color, which is a most discordant note in the house. The window ledges themselves form the bottom window stop and draft excluder, thus eliminating another ridge for dust. Unfortunately, the carpenter overlooked

this emphatic request in one or TWO of the windows, with most irritating results; so be warned to watch carefully over these small but important matters when building your country coHages. And yet another point to remember is the necessity of a little strip of wood at each end of the window ledge if the walls are of plastered stone, for without this precaution every time the ledge is dusted the plaster rubs off. The casement fasteners - a combined stay and lock - are a most satisfactory bronze finish. I have tried out many different types and have found this to be the best, in fact the only thoroughly good job.



The promise of a shddy retreat.

For two reasons I did not have a fireplace entirely of stone in the living room. First, I was anxious to expedite the building, both from the point of view of expense and the inconvenience of being without a home; secondly, one grows a little tired of stone fireplaces, and so it was quickly built up of rough stones and bricks, with just a few colorful stones slightly projecting from the plaster which covers the rough building material, and one big flat one for a shelf at one side. On the other side of the fireplace a little cupboard is built in, which we optimistically called the "bar." It is mostly full of everything else but bottles, which has brought forth the tearful declaration that "the area seems to be a 'dry one!'"

Hardwood flooring has been used for all the doors, which

drop of creosote will creep up the plaster walls we used a spirit stain for safety on the skirting to tone with the creosoted floors.

By setting the windows only two inches in from the outside walls, we have gained an inside window ledge fifteen inches wide, which is very pleasing, and the window under which the bed is placed is low enough to enable me to enjoy the garden, and not merely the tree tops, whilst I lie in bed wondering if the last possible moment has yet arrived!

Three broad shelves accommodate the wireless apparatus, which is concealed with little doors hinged with ordinary T hinges that have been hammered on the surface and cut out at the sides with a round file, and finally painted a flat black. The whole thing fits into the corner on the broad



Cool, cosy and comfortable in the living-room window-seat at Sonning Two.

are just plain ledge doors. They are hung with T hinges and fastened with black iron thumb catches — flat black, of course. They are slightly broader and lower than the regulation doorways. I have found again and again that regulation sizes and standardised materials are responsible for many failures in the finished result of a country cottage, giving it the suburban appearance almost everyone wishes to avoid. In determining the sizes the average builder will naturally suggest those that are "regulation." Let this, therefore, be the warning note and wherever practical introduce just that slight difference in measurement that will be more characteristic of a country house.

The skirting boards are 4in. hardwood flooring boards bevelled to eliminate the dust ledge, and because the slightest

window ledge at the side of the fireplace just above a corner seat. This broad ledge extends the whole length of the living room because half the wall only is of stone, the upper half being timber.

The gable end and the one timber wall are covered with 6in. oregon planks cut from the outside of the logs and, roughly, an inch in thickness. These harmonise quite well with the stonework. It was necessary to line them inside, since the rough surface made it impossible to cover the joins with cover strips" and, for this I used a thin malthoid.

The absence of a sink in the previous cottage was undeniably a great inconvenience, but the objection to them was still as strong as ever until we hit upon the idea of a wooden one. Amongst the marvellous collection of cast-off

family possessions that find their way from time to time to the more commodious outbuildings of Sonning there were some wash tubs, and, although old, the kauri was still good, and from this has been made the dearest little sink you ever saw. I was so pleased with it that I bought it a beautiful long, broad piece of kauri to sit in, and now my visitors queue up waiting their turn to wash up! There are cupboards beneath, but not with wide shelves that are inaccessible at the back and brutes to clean. The shelves are 6in. wide at the back of the cupboard for basins and saucepans, and the floor of the cupboard is 4in. above the stone floor, whilst the skirting board is set back two inches, so that there is room for one's toes without leaving ugly kicking marks. A wire basket hangs on the back of one door for the odds and ends, such as soap, dish-washer and pot cleaners, consequently there is nothing in sight above the sink. Shelves with cup hooks on the edges are immediately above the sink so that the dishes are put away as they are dried. The table is fixed to the wall leaving the floor space clear of legs, making it very simple to hose out the kitchen. Outside the kitchen door there is a stone paved area that is hosed down at the same time (sometimes!).

One enters the cottage across a little stone paved courtyard enclosed by a low stone wall on the drive side and by a retaining wall on the side which runs up the hill. Previously one entered across a lake because there was never time to raise the paving stones that had not been set to drain properly, but it did not matter about coming in with wet feet because there was a leak in the roof that no one seemed able to cure. We cured the other one quite simply with tar and sand, but not until I had been shamed into doing so by the sight of a friend to whom I had lent my bed for the night sitting up in bed reading with an umbrella.

Oh! I forgot to mention the cool cupboard for dairy produce, etc., with the draught arranged most carefully. This is set in the wall at the side of the stove; such a good idea! as it is unsuitable for dairy produce we shall probably use it for etceteras. Why it was put there is a long story and of no particular interest here.

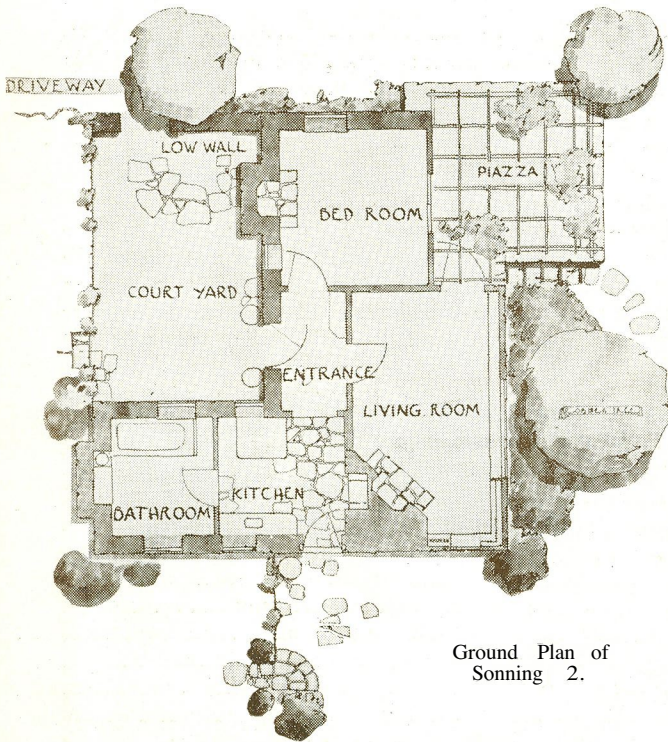
More by accident than design we have achieved one or two interesting vistas right through the house.

Aesthetically speaking; there was only one roof to have and that was one of shingles, but the cost was out of the question, and so the roof is iron! Feeling that nothing could be worse and anything would be better than the ordinary corrugated iron I had decided - still feeling very miserable about it, though - to use the sheets with the small corrugations and to lay them horizontally, when a bright young thing of twenty years suggested "Weathered Iron," and now that it is painted a sepia color it does' deceive the eye a little, and is really not at all offensive. The extra labor in laying it and the soldering of the side joints which would leak otherwise in spite of a liberal overlap, and also the soldering of every nail head make~ this material type of roof a little more expensive than corrugated iron, but it is well worth it.

Amongst the jobs demanding the least skill was the painting of the roof, and since the builder was busy making the place habitable inside I decided to take advantage of a cloudless sky and the light drying breeze. We (yes, after gazing upon the expanse of the roof I decide to collect a mate) started rather badly; my stupid assistant upset her pot of paint; I glowered my disapproval. Shortly after yells for assistance came from my side of the roof. I had upset my pot of paint and it was racing down the roof like an avalanche. She skilfully stopped its onrush and covered quite a large



The Cdbin, which WdS not damaged by the fire, but on the contrdry hds been improved.



Ground Plan of
 Sonning 2.

area of roof in doing so, whilst I sat on the ridge of the roof meditating upon the sweetness of some natures and the intolerance of others. The rain came down in torrents just as we had finished the last lap of the roof; it was rather a pity, because most of the paint came down, too. The next suitable day found the builder up on the roof putting another coat of paint on. I-er-I had other important work to do on that day!

Each day some of the left-over building material is converted into some piece of furniture, and we have by now almost all that we require. I was given an old cedar organ by a friend. Someone played the National Anthem on it and then we took it to pieces! Now it is a very super table top desk with drawers down either side. A valued possession indeed.

The experience of suddenly being bereft of everything except the threadbare riding pants you happened to don on the fatal morning is a marvellous revelation of the kindness and sympathy there is in the world. The condolences that came forth by every mail was, as a friend put it, rather like dying and having the pleasure of experiencing the kind sympathy, shown in so many ways, oneself. I wonder if those who were so very kind realise just how much they really did at the time.

A Reconstructed Garden

(Continued from Page 29)

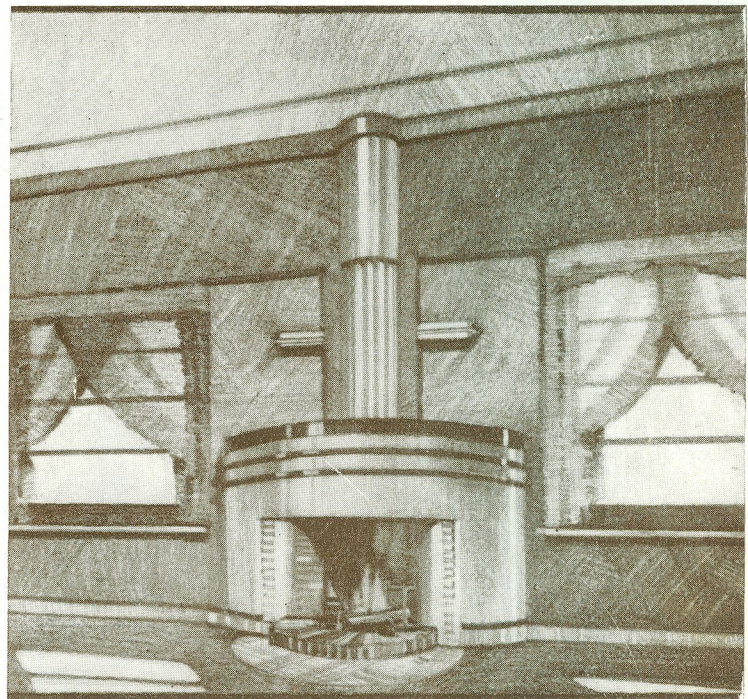
The main lawn is sunk in an oval shape irregularly, with steps leading up from it to the "crazy" path, which S"NeepSalong: the top, and connects the drive with the tradesmen's entrance.

The border along the house is filled with perennials, with three *Retinospera leptoclada* breaking the height of the house, and a specimen *Prunus mum!* in the widest part softening the severity of line.

The flowering fruit tree is also the keynote of the wide sweeping border at the front-*Pyrus malus atropurpurea* and *Prunus serrulata* (pink and white), being used - these being interplanted with light growing shrubs, such as *Poinciana Gilliesii*, *Ribes sanguinea*, *Echium candicans*, *Berberis atropurpurea*, *Craraegus crenulata* and other, the remainder being filled with annuals and perennials. Mr Begg is to be complimented on the low stone wall, which allows the beauty of the house and garden to be seen) from the road long before the house is reached, as soon, indeed, as one swings round from St. George's Road.

The planting list is as follows:-

1. *Prunus serrulata*, white; 2. *Pyrus malus atropurpurea*;
3. *Prunus serrulata*, pink; 4. *Pittosporum undulatum*; 5. *Betula alba*;
6. *Prunus Mume*; 7. *Retinospera leptoclada*;
8. *Retinospera leptoclada*; 9. Lemon; 10. Lemon; 11. *Prunus Pissardii*;
12. *Pittosporum undulatum*; 13. *Hibiscus alba plena*.



In the December issue we published photographs of between 30 and 40 fireplaces in brick, timber, marble, stone, and cement, but 'were' unable to find space for this very modern design in concrete and brick from the firm of R. M. & H. M. King, architects and engineers.