Courtyard Cottage has been formed from an old storage barn at the rear of 41 Swain Street in Watchet. When the present owner bought the property in 2011, the barn was piled high with a wide variety of junk. The buildings on Swain Street had been used as an antique/junk shop and the barn had been used to dump all unwanted items which the owners could not bring themselves to throw away. Prior to this it had been used for a variety of purposes.

The plot of land on which No 41 and its ancillary buildings stands once continued through to what is now Harbour Road and, in mediaeval times was probably a burgage plot held by a burgess. He would have rented the property from the local landowner and would ply his trade on Swain Street whilst using the buildings at the rear to support his trade and his household, probably keeping some livestock and growing some crops on outlying plots. The building on Swain Street (St Margarets Hospice shop) has mediaeval origins, although it was considerably altered in the seventeenth century and again in the late nineteenth.

The range of outbuildings including the one which became Courtyard Cottage has clearly changed much over time. Old Wyndham Estate maps (1805) show a large building which may have been a house covering the present sitting room, hall and the garden area across to the garage. The massive beam and the joists may have been part of this. Excavations revealed the foundations of this building. Nearby there were also the remains of round pillars, suggesting open-fronted animal or cart sheds. During the nineteenth century part of the plot was used as a coal yard where coal brought in from South Wales would have been stored prior to being delivered by horse and cart to inland properties.

It appears that the buildings were altered substantially towards the end of the nineteenth century when the thatched roofs were replace by slates and Bridgwater double-roman tiles. After the Great Western Railway came to Watchet, the owners of the property were contracted to the railway to collect and deliver parcels and luggage to and from the station on a waggon drawn by two shire horses which were stabled in one of the buildings (possibly what is now the kitchen). The building which is now the cottage was used for storing a variety of things, and a hoist was installed above the central opening to load heavy objects to the upper floor. An older Watchet resident remembers seats from the Cosy Cinema (what is now the doctors’ surgery) being stored there.

The first task on purchasing the property in 2011 was to clear the massive amount of junk, and plans were drawn up to convert the barn in 2012. Work on the build started later that year.
A vast amount of rubbish, rubble and soil was removed. A large number of old Bridgwater pantiles were found buried. They must have been removed from the garage and replaced by corrugated iron and plastic. They were stacked and used later to re-roof the garage.

All services were brought in underground from Swain Street—electricity, gas, water, sewerage and telephone.

A small section of the adjacent property’s garden was purchased to give access to the east end of the cottage. Behind abundant ivy an ancient window frame was revealed, probably from the time when the building was a dwelling.

A new wall was built to separate the properties, using traditional methods - reclaimed stone and lime mortar.

The welsh slates were in very poor condition and were removed. Most of the roof timbers were sound, but they were replaced where needed.
The roof was propped and the whole of the west and half of the south walls were completely rebuilt, with cavity walls and insulation to satisfy building regulations. The new west wall to the kitchen was similarly constructed and faced with stone and lime mortar.

Two steel beams were installed to support the upper floor. The roof was felted and battened using modern breathable insulation.

The south-east corner was reconstructed using reclaimed bricks and stone.

Windows were ordered and manufactured by Grandfield and Son of Nether Stowey. The dormers were formed and the frames for the kitchen extension fitted. The roof was re-slated with new slates and reclaimed Bridgewater ridge tiles. The chimney was constructed of reclaimed bricks and an old chimney pot.
A new fireplace and flue was constructed, lined with pumice blocks. The underfloor heating pipes were laid and concreted over.

The massive elm beam was supported and sand-blasted in situ. The old elm joists were removed and sanded. They could not be re-used constructionally, so were suspended between pairs of new joists which satisfied building regulations.

The floor boards were laid, and at this point, whilst the roof timbers were still exposed, the whole building was professionally treated for woodworm.

Insulation was then fitted between the rafters and underdrawn with wood panelling. The walls were studded out and insulated to current building regulations.

The garage building was not quite wide enough, so the wall was demolished and rebuilt using traditional methods. New roof timbers were fitted and surmounted by reclaimed pantiles.
The result is a cottage which retains much of the character of the original building whilst having all modern conveniences and services and meeting all current building requirements. Its south-facing aspect makes it light and bright, and its secluded position belies its proximity to the main street of Watchet. It is unique in Swain Street in having a garage, parking and a garden.