

Humphrey Repton was the first person to describe himself as a landscape gardener. Whenever he planned work, it was always presented to the client in a red leather bound book, the now famous "Red Book". He always charged 5 guineas per day for his advice, which was a very high rate in those days. He visited Ashridge in 1813, and planned a series of small more formal gardens close to the house. As he was suffering from bad health, this was his last big project. Two ash trees, which appeared on Repton's map, were part of the original ash ridge, which gave the Estate its name.

The Flower Garden recreates the style of gardening from the 19th century. It had a Flower Store (a lean-to greenhouse), and a statue of Bacchus, which was placed there in 2008.

The Rosary was a circular garden of triangular rose beds, all pointing to a central fountain approached through a pergola.

The Italian Garden is heart-shaped, but with two semi-circular beds coming from the bottom segments, and a path running through it north to south. Lady Marian Alford played a big part in designing this garden. It had been levelled during the last war, and later replanted with 12,000 box plants, but these had to be replaced recently, as they didn't work.

Other gardens added were the Skating Pond, which is now a labyrinth.

The Monks' Garden consisted of four rectangular beds, each with further rectangles within containing coats of arms of the families who owned Ashridge, and a central tall buttressed holy "well".

The Herb Garden is similar to the Rosary, but with the triangular beds each having a more rounded top, all surrounded by grass rather than gravel paths, and with an armillary sphere as a focal point.

Mr Thompson showed pictures of other gardens: -

The Lazelle Garden is partly lawn, with some mature trees, heathers and a rock garden.

The Fernery Garden is planted twice yearly with spring and summer bedding plants.

The Dry Garden has a variety of drought-resistant plants.

The Arboretum contains many specimen trees, including chestnut trees of both sorts, Cedars of Lebanon, beech, holm oak and cypresses.

The Bible Circle consists of incense cedars. There is also an Avenue of Wellingtonia trees and a Rhododendron Walk.

Repton's Arbour represents the rustic nature of garden buildings, which were popular in the early 19th century.

The renovation of the Ashridge garden concentrates not on any particular period but tries to re-establish the best example of each of part of the estate's landscape.

While Brown took a hands on approach to the works carried out at Ashridge, Blenheim and Aynho, Repton presented his designs and left the client to realise the plans using their own workers. We can certainly see evidence of Brown, the avenues and ha-ha but we are less sure of which of Repton's idea were implemented. The inclusions of parkland thickets and planting alongside the avenues to soften them is typical of Repton. There is little evidence that any of the formal gardens, which would be expected, were ever constructed. Perhaps the cost of the house redevelopment prohibited the building of Repton's garden. There is more research to be done!

At Ashridge, there are plans in preparation for celebrating the tri-centenary of Brown's birth in three years time. Two years later is the bicentenary of Repton's death. Both house and garden are open to visitors.

Tea & coffee was kindly provided by Gardening Club members.

4. Forthcoming meetings

May 29th "Sex, Drink and Death in the 17th Century"

Mr Tim Healey

June 26th "What Archaeology is all about"

Mr David Jennings

July 31st History and Tour of Friars Well. Members only, or by prior arrangement.

Mr and Mrs R Sermon