

### **Tour of the Gardens – Jane Foster, sister of Lord Ashbrook.**

“Over the last 20 years I have visited many of the most outstanding gardens in Britain. When admiring these gardens I have often pondered on what it is that makes Arley so special.

For me I think what contributes its special character and distinction is the very strong design – the ‘bones of the garden’ - to use my mother’s phrase. This has come about over the centuries as a result of gradual inspired developments by my ancestors. I would particularly like to mention the elegantly landscaped Park, which has always been seen as an essential backdrop to the garden, almost reminiscent of the Japanese idea of ‘borrowed scenery’. Many long vistas in the garden end in magnificent views of the park, which for me provide a marvelous feeling of spaciousness, often not to be found in the many wonderful gardens created in the 20th Century. I would like to encourage you to come here and see it for yourself, but I will now take you on a virtual tour, telling you about some of the most interesting and attractive things that you will see.”

### **The Pleached Lime Avenue**

“You will approach the Hall and Gardens at Arley by walking along the magnificent Pleached Lime Avenue. These trees, planted in the 1850s, have been clipped to form a giant hedge on stilts, 8m high. Since they have been clipped every year they have never reached maturity (never producing flowers and fruit) with the result that the trunks are still the size of a tree of about 20 years old.”



### **The Clock Tower and The Ride**



“Just beyond the old cobbled Stable Yard, on the right of the archway, is the large medieval Cruck barn, known as The Ride since it was used as an indoor riding school in the 19th century. It was built from giant oak trunks in 1471, contemporary with the first Arley Hall. In the 19th century, in order to allow a new road to pass through, one bay of this barn was opened up by Rowland Egerton-Warburton, my great, great grandfather, and surmounted with the famous Arley Clock Tower. The clock is 19th century, but Rowland removed one hand so as to make it look much older, possibly even contemporary with the barn, so that now it only points to the hour. However it keeps excellent time & the sonorous bell can be heard from all over the Garden”.

## The Flag Garden

“Walking down towards the house you enter the Garden beside the Flag Garden. This secluded, paved area was created by Antoinette Egerton-Warburton, my great grand-mother, in 1902 as a cosy place for her to sit with her children and her friends. A selection of hybrid tea and floribunda roses in beds edged with lavender surround a small statue in the centre. In spring clematis alpina ‘Maidwell Hall’ covers pillars with its showy double blue bells, followed by varieties of clematis texensis and vitivcella. Throughout the summer abutilon x milleri covers one end of the south facing wall with its delightful orange and black bell flowers and on the east facing wall is a large, striking and unusual climber, schizophragma hydrangeoides ‘Roseum’, rather like a pink form of climbing hydrangea.”



## The Furlong Walk



“Leaving the Flag Garden you walk along the path lined with ancient yew hedges to the Furlong Walk. This path, so called because it is exactly 220 yards long, was built on the site of an earlier road to the Hall. Rowland was blind for the last 20 years of his life and he used to take his exercise walking up and down this path. It now forms the SW boundary of the garden with a low wall built on top of the ‘Ha-Ha’.”

## The Herbaceous Border

“Half way along the Furlong Walk the planting on the right opens up to provide your first view of the famous double Herbaceous Border, with the Alcove built about 1790 at the far end, the first such border to have been made in England. The four pairs of beds are backed on one side by an eighteenth century wall and on the other by a yew hedge planted in the 19th Century. Between the beds are handsome yew finials designed by Rowland Egerton-Warburton and planted in 1856. The planting in the Border is now carefully controlled to include only cool colours in the first part of the summer, with hotter colours coming in later on. In May, before the main body of perennials flower, there is a striking combination of large purple alliums, surrounded by burgeoning clumps of greenery, and backed by magnificent specimens of evergreen Ceanothus on the south-facing wall. With the exception of small bushes of the purple leaved berberis ‘Atropurpurea Nana’ no shrubs are included. Walk along to the Alcove to see the identification photos of some of the plants, then turn round to enjoy the lovely view along the Border towards the Park.”



## The Ilex Avenue

“This unique feature consists of seven pairs of the evergreen oak, quercus ilex, clipped into enormous cylinders, marching like giant soldiers across the garden. Eight metres high and 3m in diameter, they were planted by Rowland Egerton-Warburton in the 1850s. Clipping them every August is quite a challenge for the garden staff!”



“As you walk from the Herbaceous Border towards the Ilex Avenue you see on your left a pretty little half-timbered cottage, built in the mid 19th century, as a place for the family to enjoy afternoon tea. In the 1960s my mother became captivated by the charms of the old shrub roses which she planted in large beds around the Tea Cottage. There is now a collection of some 30 or 40 varieties, complimented by tall perennials such as crambe cordifolia, hollyhocks, verbascums, white foxgloves and the beautiful spires of eremurus.”

### **The Fish Garden**

“This small garden, originally part of a bowling green, was created in the 1920s by Lettice Waters, my grandmother, and reflects the fashionable tastes of that time for sunken gardens. Low bedding plants and the delightful furry, blue-grey mounds of *chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Boulevard' surround a small pond. The garden is edged with a low wall on which are growing many sun-loving plants, including Angel's Fishing Rods (*dierama pulcherrimum*) with their graceful arching stems of deep pink bells.”



### **The Sundial**

“At the far end of the Ilex Avenue is the Sundial Circle, where a sundial on a pedestal is surrounded by the long flowering rose ‘Erfurt’, backed by huge banks of the marvellously sweet smelling philadelphus ‘Belle Etoile’. Two magnificent urns flank the steps at the entrance to the circle and the ‘Ha-Ha’ provides a continuous view into the park beyond. In spring azaleas and the lovely Blue Poppy, *meconopsis grandis*, liven up the beds along with a large specimen of *kalmia latifolia* with its delicious curved petals, shading from white to deep pink, looking exactly like strawberry ice cream. Later on huge rambling roses climb up tall behind the beds.”



### **The Rootree**

“A path on the right of the Sundial Circle leads to the Rootree, a garden laid out in the mid 19th century to resemble a miniature mountain landscape, complete with hills, rocks, a pool and a secret grotto. When first created it was planted largely with ferns; it was named after a number of large roots or stumps of trees upon which twined ivies and other climbing plants. In the 1950s my mother transplanted to this site a number of very old varieties of brightly coloured deciduous azaleas, many of which have a marvellously sweet, rich scent.”

There are a number of other striking trees and shrubs including crinodendron hookerianum, with its scarlet lantern-like flowers in May-June and some splendid mature specimens of Japanese acer with their marvellous red and bronze leaves, especially beautiful in autumn. Magnificent 100 year old specimens of the giant fern, osmunda regalis, are growing in the pool, along with the Skunk Cabbage, lysichiton americanum, which produces its giant yellow flowers in April, followed by equally enormous spinach-like leaves.”



“At the back of the Rootree, above the waterfall, you climb some steps into the Rough. In the Horse Trough Garden on the left you will see the huge leaves of gunnera manicata, like enormous umbrellas. The Rough, an unmown area filled with daffodils and bluebells in spring, is also home to a number of unusual trees, including a beautiful large variegated maple, acer platanoides ‘Drumondii’, Cornus controversa ‘Variegata’ with its delightful tiered branches of creamy coloured leaves, Cornus kousa ‘Chinensis’ and its pink form, both with showy bracts of flowers in early summer.”

### **The Walled Garden**

“This large area, originally one of the kitchen gardens for the house, was in 1960 redesigned to its present appearance by Elizabeth Ashbrook. The stone pond in the centre, guarded by 4 heraldic beasts originally on the roof of Arley Hall, is surrounded by white ‘Iceberg’ roses and billowing clouds of blue nepeta, lime green ‘Lady’s Mantle’ and four fine specimens of the fastigate beech, fagus sylvatica ‘Dawyck’. The idealised flower sculpture in the centre of the pond was created by Tom Leaper and was donated to the Gardens in 2006 by The Friends of Arley, in memory of my mother (1911-2002). The walls at the back of the garden are covered with fruit trees, many dating back to the 19th century, but they now also create shelter for a number of attractive trees and shrubs, providing lots of colour and interest in flowers, fruit or foliage throughout the year. I find the huge open expanse of this garden and the wide green lawns wonderfully serene, a feeling which is particularly enjoyable if you sit on the stone seat at the far end and look back down the great north-south axis of the garden, along the Ilex Avenue to the park beyond.”



## The Kitchen Garden & Arbour Walk

“The path from the Walled Garden then crosses the Kitchen Garden, where vegetables are grown in beds behind a walk edged with sweet smelling rosa rugosa, under planted with tulips and hardy cyclamen. Metal arches in the shape of the brick archways at either end support clematis and other climbers. Halfway along the Rose Walk is the Malus Seat, a bench enclosed by a curved arch of clipped Malus trees, covered in spring with masses of pinky white flowers and in autumn with the delightful small crab apples.

My sister-in-law, Zoe Ashbrook, designed the Arbour Walk and the vegetable garden behind from 1990 onwards. Opposite the Malus Seat a delicate white painted wirework arbour, brought here from my father’s old family home in Ireland. This delightful folly, decorated with urns and pinnacles, has a fairy tale nature, as though it was made of spun icing sugar. Massive cardoons are planted in the borders lining the path, their strong architectural shapes a complete contrast to the Arbour. Drifts of tulips and wall-flowers provide bright jewel-like colour in spring, giving way later on to the softer shapes and colours of peonies and irises. In late summer there is a riot of tender and half hardy annuals and perennials, chosen for their light airy nature echoing the delicate frothy structure of the Arbour.”



## The Vinery

“On the North side of the Kitchen Garden is the magnificent Victorian Vinery, 28 metres long. Inside are fig trees as old as the building itself and a selection of tender plants such as olive, tibouchina, plumbago and ginger plants with their lovely showy flowers in late summer. Opposite the eastern end of the building, clianthus puniceus grows on a sunny sheltered wall, producing its dramatic red flowers, like huge lobster claws, in May -June.”



## The Herb Garden & Scented Garden

“As you leave the Kitchen Garden, a gap in the yew hedge on your right leads to these two small gardens, both designed by my mother in about 1960. In the first, a variety of herbs surround a stone finial, whose shape is echoed in the clipped box. In the Scented Garden are a number of small shrubs and perennials with strongly scented flowers including *Smilacina racemosa*, a lovely perennial resembling a fluffy version of ‘Solomon’s Seal’, and some beautiful specimens of *Euphorbia mellifera*, a handsome evergreen which produces in May masses of orangey brown flowers smelling strongly of honey.”



## The Grove



“On the east side of the hall, beyond the Chapel, my brother, Lord Ashbrook, has developed a large woodland garden over the thirty years or so. There is a large collection of specie and hybrid rhododendrons and azaleas which with daffodils and narcissus in variety give a spectacular show in April and May. In addition, there are rich planting of acer, sorbus, birch, magnolia, camellia, malus, viburnums, euonymus, cornus, prunus and many other trees and shrubs which makes it one of the most beautiful and interesting woodland gardens in the North West. Altogether the Grove presents a delightful contrast to the more formal gardens established earlier. The display in spring and early summer of flowering shrubs under the dappled shade of mature native hardwoods is particularly striking, but at all seasons of the year there is colour and interest. Beyond it is a Woodland Walk which takes the visitor through largely natural undisturbed woodland interspersed with plantings of exotic trees and shrubs.”