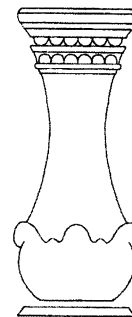


VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER



Honorary Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE

Issue no. 10 October 2001

A message from Ted Fawcett OBE

Shortly before VPC began the 'big dig' of Valentines Mansion's east border, in preparation for its Regency-style replanting, we received the following letter from our vice-president, Ted Fawcett:

Talk is OK, but 'do' is better, so a big welcome to the Big Dig. The Regency style of planting is interesting and seldom seen in public parks, involving as it does a catholic mixture of annuals, bulbs, herbaceous plants and shrubs. The danger is that the shrubs 'win all', so they need to be carefully watched, pruned, and replaced if necessary.

Soil preparation in Valentine's hungry soil will be very important, but the reward is great. I did a Regency scheme at Osterley Park, keeping carefully to historic varieties, and planning and maintaining a scheme of colour control. I was particularly fond of the tulips; not the virus-infested Rembrandts, but their nearest natural equivalents.

Congratulations and good luck to you all.

Ted Fawcett

How it was: recollections of a head gardener

We are very grateful for the following information, which has been taken from recollections and papers kindly made available to us by Mr Frank Brean, who was head gardener at Valentines Park in the 1960s and '70s:

During World War II, Ilford Parks Department grew most of the vegetables used in Ilford schools' kitchens, and the Dig for Victory campaign encouraged members of the public to grow their own produce.

The Ilford Horticultural Society was formed at the end of the war as follow-on from the allotment plot demonstrations which had been regular and popular features at allotments and recreational areas within the borough.

The parks department played a very important part in getting the horticultural society established, providing considerable support and publicity, such as staging elaborate floral displays around the borough.

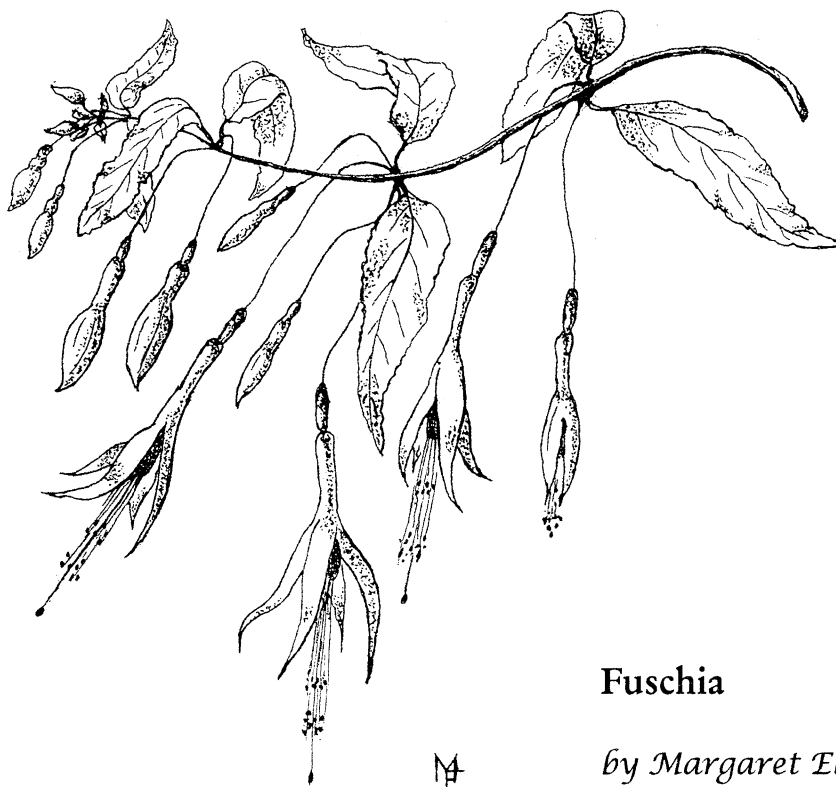
The main summer show was held in a large marquee in Valentines Park, at the same time as a popular and much-publicised gymkhana, which was a preliminary to a later event at White City Stadium which attracted up-and-coming stars such as Harvey Smith and David Broome.

Practically all the plants for such events were grown by the parks department, and the staff numbers thus employed were considerable: even as late as 1969, there were some 60 employees based at Valentines Park alone. We can never expect to return to those times, but must hope for improvements to current numbers after the park's restoration.

Janet Plimmer

Editor's note: We hope to feature further reminiscences by Mr Brean in future editions of the newsletter.

Seen in the park ...



Fuschia

by Margaret Elvin

Visit to Hylands House, Chelmsford

Many thanks to the Friends of Valentines Mansion for organising an evening coach trip to Hylands House on 11 September. This proved to be an enjoyable visit, the grim, wider events of the day notwithstanding.

Several VPC members joined the trip, to see how this country house, similar in age to Valentines, though larger, was being renovated and run by Chelmsford council.

Our guide gave us a brief tour of some of the grounds, talked about restoration and funding over refreshments, and then conducted a tour of the house.

Most interesting was the contrast between the restored areas of the building - the central part and one wing on the ground floor - and the still-derelict other wing and upper storey. The derelict rooms had window partitions temporarily installed in place of doors, allowing us to see rooms with no floorboards, plaster-less walls, boarded-up windows, and partially-collapsed ceilings. It emphasised just how much

work had gone into the restored areas, and how much was still to be done, and at what expense.

I think many of us left feeling a little depressed at the contrast between the care that Hylands has received over recent years, and the neglect suffered by our own mansion and park. Nevertheless, the visit provided many ideas on how such historic premises can be successfully managed, and it is to be hoped that our Heritage Lottery Fund bids will one day result in Valentines being equally attractive.

Karen Lane

We recently learnt of the death of Valentines Park Conservationist Mrs Alice Hartley, who was one of our most supportive members. Although confined to a wheel-chair, she regularly attended our tree walks and other events, and her presence on these occasions was much appreciated. She will be missed by many of us.

News Update: Leisure Services and the Heritage Lottery Fund bids

We are particularly pleased that Nigel Burch has recently been appointed Acting Chief Leisure Services Officer for the London Borough of Redbridge. Nigel has been a very good friend to us, allowing us the use of Valentines Mansion for our AGM this year, helping us with arrangements for The Big Dig planting scheme, and in numerous other ways.

Nigel's appointment is most timely, as he is now able to co-ordinate the submission of the Phase I applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund for both the mansion and the park, which should hopefully have taken place in September. The close link between the restoration plans for the mansion and park should increase the chances of success for both schemes.

Progress of The Big Dig

The first weekend of digging, in fine autumn weather on 8 and 9 September, enabled us to double-dig about one third of the area designated for replanting, on the east side of Valentines Mansion.

Our vice-president, Mike Gapes MP, kindly assisted in opening the first trench, and at the time of writing 21 people have participated in digging relays. So far, excavations have yielded archaeology such as pieces of pottery, ornate ironwork, a 1918 penny, and the walls of the conservatory boiler room.

Very surprisingly, another room, extending under the mansion, was discovered by contractors removing a concrete slab which was thought to be merely the base of the old fire escape. Nigel Burch and Jim Hetherington, the borough conservation officer, peered down the hole created by the removal of the concrete, and were puzzled to see at least one room not shown on any known plans of the mansion. Their investigations are continuing inside the mansion, but meanwhile, if anybody can shed light on the existence of this room (or rooms?), please contact us.

Thus the mansion and park's histories and mysteries continue to fascinate!

Christine Fairfax

Valentines Park goes global!

Earlier this year we set up a website providing information about Valentines Park and the work we are doing to restore its gardens and features. The website has proved very popular, with typically over 100 visits each month. And they've come from all over the world - our site has been visited by people from the UK, America, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, South Africa, Spain and Sweden - and that's just in the last three months! Not a bad for a local conservation group.

Most interesting though, has been the many e-mails and phone calls we've received from people who used to live in Ilford and remember Valentines Park with great affection. We have accumulated many messages of support and some fascinating reminiscences which all add to our picture of the park and the part it played - and continues to play - in the lives of residents.

Our website is due for a major overhaul in the next 2-3 months, so make sure you've bookmarked www.valentinespark.org.uk to keep up-to-date with the changes. And if you have any stories or information you think should be on our site, please contact me on 020 8554 or e-mail david.lane@

David Lane

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EVENTS DIARY

Plant-up of the Regency border

Well done to all the volunteers who helped with the Big Dig. The amount and standard of work done is a credit to the determination of the group to make a real and lasting contribution towards the restoration of our park.

We will be planting up our new border on 3 November starting at 11.00am, rain or shine. Putting in about 240 plants will require careful planning, so Christine Fairfax will be drawing up a rota nearer the time.

We hope to have some sort of official planting ceremony, probably towards the end of the day, but again, more of this via the grapevine nearer the time.

Those of you who don't feel up to planting can easily contribute in other ways. For instance, I know from experience that gardeners are very fond of home-made fruit cake, which is essential for keeping up energy levels.

Any contributions will be gratefully received.

Stephen Smith

Sunday 21 October 2001

Autumn birdwatching with Peter Hopkins.
Meet 8.30am by the Pavilion. The walk should last about an hour and a half.

Saturday 27 October

Bird nest-box check and cleaning. 10.30am.
Please contact Christine Fairfax (020 8551 1563) for further details.

Sunday 28 October

Autumn Tree Walk. Guided walk by Stephen Smith. Meet 2.30pm by the Pavilion. The walk should last about an hour.

Saturday 3 November

Planting the East Border. 11.00am onwards
See article above for further details.

Saturday 24 November

Work in the Old English Garden and pruning in the Rosery. Helpers welcome for any amount of time between 10.30am-1.00pm.

Sunday 30 December

Wildlife Mystery Walk. Work off that seasonal sluggishness while finding the answers to our simple quiz. Meet 2.00pm by the Pavilion. Refreshments in the Pavilion at 3.30pm.

Sunday 17 February 2002

Winter migrant birdwatching with Peter Hopkins. Meet 9.00am by the Pavilion. The walk should last about an hour and a half.

Saturday 23 February

General maintenance work in the OEG and Rosery. Helpers welcome for any time between 10.30am-1.00pm.

For further details of these events please contact Stephen Smith (8554) or Christine Fairfax (8551).

EVENTS AT VALENTINES MANSION

Wednesday 21 - Sunday 25 November

Exhibition by the Valentines Mansion Steering Group of their business plan, which will form the basis of the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for London. Wednesday to Saturday 1.00-4.00pm, Sunday 11.00am-4.00pm.

Friday 7 December

Music, Magic and Mince Pies. 8.00pm. Hosted by the Friends of Valentines Mansion.

Thursday 14 February 2002

Wine Tasting at the Mansion. 8.00pm. Hosted by the Friends of Valentines Mansion and Waitrose supermarket.

Further details of these events will appear in the Friends' forthcoming newsletter, or contact Georgina Green (8500) for information on the exhibition, and Cherry Hooker (8554) for details of the evening events.