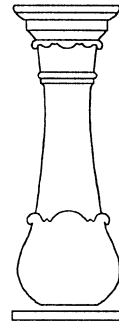


# VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER



Honorary Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE

Issue no. 12 July 2002

## A splash of spring colour

At a recent meeting between VPC committee members and the L B Redbridge Leisure Services, Patrick Buttress, the Park and Countryside Manager, suggested that we might like to help bring some extra spring colour to the park by planting some drifts of bulbs this autumn. We are pleased that we have been given another opportunity to make an impact on the park's appearance, following our creation of the mansion's Regency border last autumn.

This year's autumn activity will not be as ambitious as last year's, but it will have the same advantage of being a single, short-term project in which a number of VPC members can take part.

Bulb planting day has been set for Saturday 26 October, and I'm sure many of you will be there, trowels in hand, to help in the important task of regenerating our park. Who knows, there might even be tea and cake to hand ...

Please see our events diary for further details of what will hopefully be an enjoyable working day. See you in October, if not before!

*Stephen Smith*

## Bats in the park

Redbridge's Nature Conservation Officer, Stephania Davani, has recently arranged training sessions to enable groups of interested people to survey certain sites in the borough for protected, rare and threatened species such as water voles and bats. One such site is Valentines Park, which will be surveyed for bats as part of the park restoration plans, which include enhancements to benefit wildlife. It is important to identify areas within the park which are suitable for bats, and to gain an idea of the numbers of the different types of bat in the park.

Linda Beard from the London Bat Group lead a recent survey training session, and has kindly

agreed to lead a Bat Walk in the park on Friday 23 August, in anticipation of European Bat Week, which runs from 24 to 30 August. The event, which is being run jointly with the Friends of Valentines Mansion, will start at 7.30pm at the mansion, where Linda will first of all demonstrate the monitoring equipment which allows us to hear the bats high-frequency echolocation ultrasounds. We'll then set off to find and identify bats in the park, before returning to the mansion for refreshments.

Should the weather be unsuitable for us and/or the bats to venture out, Linda will give a slide presentation in the mansion. We anticipate this event will be very popular so please book your place early, by telephoning Christine Fairfax on (020) 8551 or Cherry Hooker on 8554 - and on the night, please bring a torch!

*Christine Fairfax*

## Out now ...

Local historian Herbert Hope Lockwood has recently written a book on aspects of Valentines' history, and its influence on the Anglo-American poet Denise Levertov, who spent her childhood in Ilford.

'*The Inspiration of Valentines: A Place of Origin*' can be purchased from the VPC and the Friends of Valentines Mansion, who will share profits from the sale of the book. Priced £5, it will be available at VPC events over the coming months.

The book can also be purchased from Mr Lockwood, at

Tel: (020) 8590

(Please allow 75p for postage and packing).

We are very grateful to Mr Lockwood for allowing us to benefit from the sale of his book, and wish his venture every success.

## The trees of Valentines Park - a tribute to Frank Brean

We were saddened to learn of the recent death, at the age of 92, of Mr Frank Brean, who was the head gardener at Valentines Park during the 1970s. It is to him that we owe many of the memories of the well-kept park of those times, and readers of this newsletter may know that we recently ran a series of recollections based on papers kindly lent to us by Mr Brean.

Mr Brean's papers also showed his keen interest in the trees of Valentines Park, and so we felt it timely to begin a series profiling some of the more important and interesting specimens in the park today, beginning with probably the best known and one of the oldest ...

The *Cedar of Lebanon* (*Cedrus Lebani*). Mr Brean's research led him to believe that this tree might be some 600 years old, having been planted in a clearing in Hainault Forest, which then extended as far as what is now central Ilford. This may be so, but the Cedar of Lebanon was a very fashionable planting in the late 17th and early 18th centuries in parklands of many large estates, and it seems likely that the Valentines cedar dates from this period.

Nearby is a *Tulip Tree* (*Liriodendron Tulipifera*). Geological evidence indicates that the Tulip Tree was widely distributed in Europe before the Ice Age, and was reintroduced to this country from North America in the 19th century. It is very distinctive, with large four-lobed leaves, tulip-shaped yellowish-green flowers, and a fine yellow autumn foliage colour. It is grown widely in the eastern states of America, where the wood is used to make veneers and musical instruments. Our specimen at Valentines is fully mature, at perhaps 80 feet tall.

*Janet Plimmer*

*Editor's note: We hope to feature more examples of Valentines' outstanding trees in future editions of the newsletter. In the meantime, please see the events diary for details of our guided tour of the American Gardens, which contain both the Cedar of Lebanon and the Tulip Tree.*

## Recent VPC events at the mansion

Our AGM was very well attended, with Vice President Mike Gapes MP coming along to hear the committee report on a year of solid progress and achievements. Mike also told us that the bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund had been well received and looked set to get approval - good news indeed. Some 'No really, I couldn't eat anymore - I'm so full' catering from Dinah and her team, plus a fascinating description by Georgina Green of Charles Raymond's gardens at Valentines, and their inspiration in Wanstead House, meant that this AGM ranks as one of the best yet.

Our 'Regency Revisited' event was cursed with some typical cold, wet weather but blessed with a good turnout - some 40 people attended, including councillors Charles Elliman, Alex Hilton and Vic Tewari, and MP Mike Gapes. Stephen, having the professional gardener's eye for bad weather, had arranged a short presentation on the connections between Valentines' landscape and the various fashions that have shaped Britain's parks and gardens, which substituted nicely for the egg-and-spoon race, quoits and boules we had planned. Janet Plimmer and her helpers organised the usual excellent spread of cakes and other goodies and so a very enjoyable time was had by all.

*David Lane*

## Park-life diary

Having recently started a two-year survey of the park as part of the British Trust for Ornithology's London Bird Project, I thought a few highlights might be of interest.

### April/May

Three species are over from their winter break: four blackcap, two willow warbler and a single swallow feeding over the lake. Alas, this does not a summer make, or so I've heard.

Still on the lake: two pairs of great crested grebe have begun nesting. Fingers crossed that they can hold out against our prolific coot population. No swans, though all our other residents are busy gathering nesting materials.

**May/June**

The air is still full of song, and if you listen carefully you can hear the high-pitched begging calls of hungry chicks as mum and dad frantically look for worms, caterpillars, and anything else that crawls. Luckily, youngsters hoping to turn into fully fledged waterfowl can more or less feed themselves from the off, and pigeons produce a kind of milk from their crop.

We have two new families in the park this year (new to me anyway): in the brook, a pair of grey wagtails have been seen feeding young, and the juvenile birds are now independent. Look out for the slate-grey upper parts with yellow and white below and a long and waggly tail.

Now meet the pochard family, a handsome chestnut-headed father, a drab and overworked mother (male ducks have nothing to do with their young), and four little pochards. Most of the time they seem to be on their own and very bold, but I'm sure the old folks aren't far away. These will be one of around 400 broods in the country, so they are not that common. Also look for a pair of ruddy ducks: the drake with his blue bill, white cheeks and red back is one of our most dapper visitors.

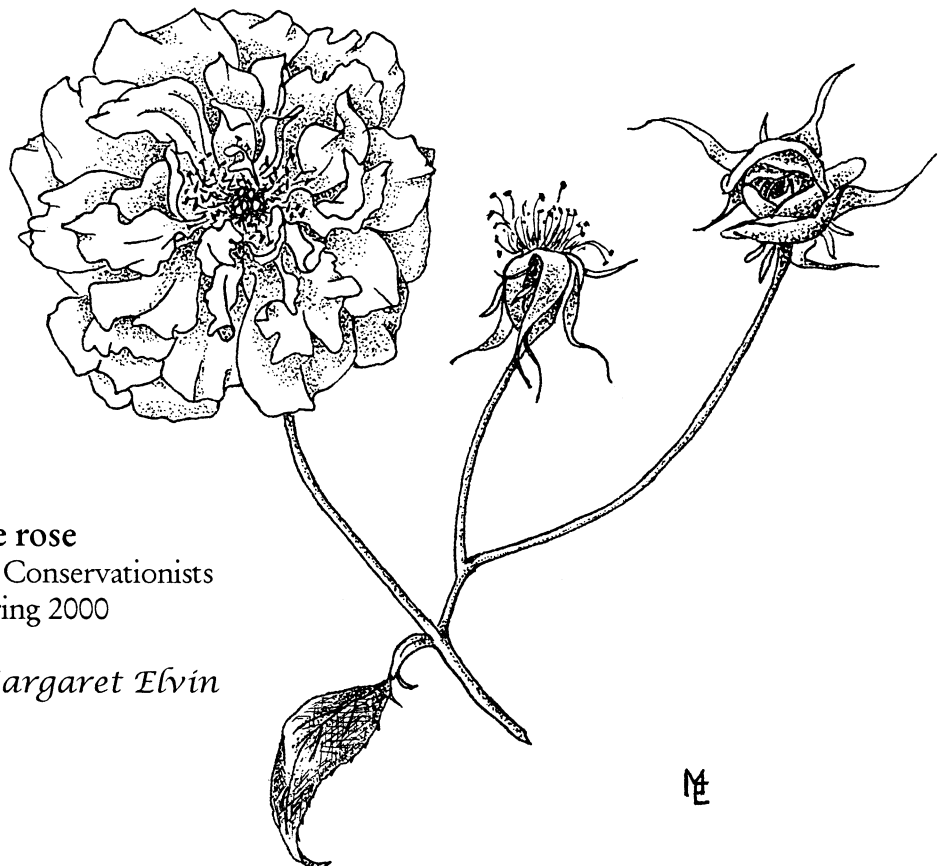
On the grebe front, the island nest has sadly failed. As it was actually touching a coot's nest, it wasn't in an ideal site, but there is still plenty of time for a second attempt elsewhere. Another nest, in a more secluded spot under an overhanging oak, holds three eggs, laid at two-day intervals. These may hatch any day now.

Sparrowhawks are also rearing chicks and can be seen hunting regularly. This mustn't be frowned upon, as many species feed on birds and eggs, including herons, woodpeckers, coots, magpies, crows, jays and squirrels. This is all part of nature's balance. I think the 19 goslings are pretty safe, though.

Did someone mention squirrels? Whatever your point of view, their kittens (? pups? kids?) are very cute. Between mid-April and the end of May they went from 14 to 52 sightings. Not the most accurate method of counting but a good guide to how our American friends are doing. I wonder how many of these young mammals and birds will survive to adulthood? Only two from each breeding pair need to do so to maintain their species' population.

Why not try a bit of I-spy yourself?

*Peter Hopkins.*

**'Alista Stella Gray' noisette rose**

Planted by the Valentines Park Conservationists  
in the Old English Garden, spring 2000

*Margaret Elvin*

## An unusual bit of restoration

A lot of rubbish and invasive 'jungle' has recently been cleared from the walled garden near the mansion, in preparation for surveying the 18th century walls prior to their repair. Unfortunately, the VPC discovered that a builder's trolley, which we had found useful for carrying heavy containers of water to our planting schemes, had also disappeared as a result of this clearance.

However, during one of our recent work sessions in the park, we noticed some metal objects that were almost buried under one of the walled garden's remaining shrubs, a huge overgrown buddleia. Stephen and Dinah started heaving out the pieces, and Stephen joyfully recognised an old bowser and trundle. (*Ed. - for the uninitiated (like me): I've been told that this is a kind of water tank and trolley*).

After tipping out the water, mud and weeds from the galvanised, oval-shaped bowser and hooking it up on the trundle, we tried it out, and found that the dogs in the park ran off in terror, at the monstrous sound of its squeaking, screaming, complaining wheels!

It's amazing what a transformation a little oil can bring! This old contraption is wonderfully efficient and functional, with solid rubber wheels which easily carry heavy loads without deflating. The bowser and trundle are now much prized pieces of equipment which we are allowed to use. We wonder how old they are, and how many of the permanent gardening staff who cared for the park throughout the years had used them.

During a recent trip to the organic gardens at Audley End we spotted another bowser and trundle, and noted with some pride that ours are in much better condition, and far more elegant in design!

*Christine Fairfax*

## It could be worse ...

Recently David and I visited Copped Hall, near Epping, on an Open Day, and followed guided tours of some of the grounds and the walled garden.

As members of both the VPC and Friends of Valentines Mansion, we were interested to see how the Copped Hall Trust and supporters are restoring their house and grounds. However, these are in a different league altogether from our mansion and park: Valentines is at least useable; Copped Hall, extensively damaged by fire in 1917 and partially dismantled, then vandalised, since, has no roof, ceilings, floorboards, plasterwork or windows - though one wing houses a tree, now at roof height! And the grounds and walled garden, reclaimed from complete wilderness by the Friends of the Copped Hall Trust and other volunteers over the past five years, are still largely only grassed over, though some new planting has recently taken place.

The restored racquets court, which now serves as an exhibition and meeting centre, contained photographs taken in the Edwardian era, showing the then grandeur of the house and opulence of the formal gardens. The contrast with the dereliction of today couldn't be greater. The Trust surely cannot hope to restore the estate to its former condition, and I wondered how many hours of despair have been and will be experienced over the years.

It will be interesting to return to see the restoration progressing - and of course to enjoy the end result, in who knows how many years' time.

*Karen Lane*

*Copped Hall open days and guided tours are held on several Sundays throughout the year. For further information contact Mrs Sylvia Keith at*

*or telephone 01992 . See also the enclosed flyer for more details of this and other historic premises.*

## EVENTS DIARY

### **Saturday 13 July**

*Jubilee Heritage 2002.* Fair organised by the Redbridge Arts Council. Fullwell Cross library, Barkingside, 10.00am-4.00pm, admission free. The VPC will be running a stall.

### **Saturday 27 July**

Work on the Old English Garden and mansion borders, 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet OEG.

### **Sunday 18 August**

*Overlooked, overgrown and over here.* A walk with Stephen Smith to explore the introduced plant species in the American Gardens. 3.00-4.00pm. Meet by the Aviary.

### **Friday 23 August**

*Bat walk.* Organised by the VPC and Friends of Valentines Mansion. Starts 7.30pm at Valentines Mansion. Please bring a torch. *NB: Limited places - please book in advance by telephoning Christine Fairfax (020 8551 ) or Cherry Hooker (8554 ).*

### **Saturday 31 August**

General maintenance work on the Regency border, Old English Garden and the Rosery. 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet OEG.

### **Saturday 21 & Sunday 22 September**

*Open House weekend.* Valentines Mansion will again be open as part of LB Redbridge's contribution to London Open House weekend. This year the Essex Art Club will hold an exhibition of their work on the ground floor. 11.00am-5.00pm.

### **Sunday 22 September**

*Birdwatching with Peter Hopkins.* A walk to observe the winter migrants which should be arriving now. Meet 8.30am by the Pavilion café.

### **Saturday 28 September**

General maintenance work on the Regency border, Old English Garden and the Rosery. 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet OEG.

### **Saturday 5 October**

*Coffee morning at Valentines Mansion.*

Organised by the Friends of Valentines Mansion. In addition to refreshments, there will be a stall selling tea towels, notelets, pens, etc, which have been produced by the Friends to raise funds for the restoration of the mansion. 10.00am-12.30pm, with a VPC walk at 11.15am, to look at the history and horticulture of the mansion's formal gardens.

### **Saturday 26 October**

*A splash of spring colour.* Bulb planting, with refreshments. 10.00am-1.00pm. Meet by the Aviary.

### **Saturday 30 November**

Work on the Rose Garden. 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet OEG.

*For further details of these events please contact Stephen Smith (020 8554 )  
Christine Fairfax (8551 )  
or David Lane (8554 )*

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