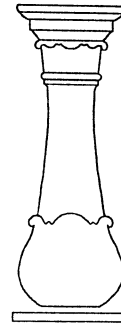


VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER

Honorary Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE



Issue no. 14 March 2003

Our Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM has been set for Sunday 6 April, starting at 2.30pm in the mansion. As previously, it will consist of a brisk business meeting, followed by a presentation. This year, I'll be presenting *Valentines in Living Memory*, which I hope will include some interesting material, drawn from a number of local sources, on the ups and downs of life in the park over the past few decades.

As far as the business meeting is concerned, this year will be an important one for the VPC as the Heritage Lottery Fund bid enters its final stages. We anticipate our expertise and ideas will be drawn upon to a greater extent as the master plan for the park is fleshed out and work gets underway.

As usual, Dinah and her team will be providing refreshments (contributions of cakes, etc. will be very welcome), though this may put us in danger of being as plump as the squirrels have been this winter after eating so many of the bulbs we planted in the Regency border! Please be as supportive as you have been in the past. I look forward to seeing you on the 6 April.

Stephen Smith

Funding update

Our last newsletter mentioned that the Area 7 wards committee had awarded us funding from their Discretionary Budget for certain projects in the formal gardens. In the central area of the Rose Garden, members can now see the ironwork which has been restored by local craftsman Jimmy Tait, assisted by Colin Willingale, who previously restored the ironwork in the Old English Garden. We are pleased with their improvements, and are now considering suitable plantings for the centre of the Rose Garden. Sourcing a suitable urn for this garden and a bird-bath for the OEG is still in hand.

On 10 December 2002 the Area 7 committee were advised that the borough's grounds maintenance

contracts expire on 31 December 2003, and that new specifications for the next five years were being prepared. The borough is split into three geographically-based contracts but, subject to the success of the Lottery bid application, Valentines Park will in future operate on a fourth, separate contract. This is welcome news as it will enable an enhanced level of specification to be achieved and accounting processes should be transparent enough to meet Lottery Fund requirements.

On 3 February 2003 the Area 7 committee were shown the borough's proposed budget for the Capital Programme. This includes £352,000 for 2004-5 and £300,000 for 2005-6 for the Valentines Park restoration scheme. It is hoped that this project will start in 2003-4 with £150,000 from the Partnership Development Fund. The Revenue Budget includes an additional £60,000 for both 2004-5 and 2005-6, which may cover costs for expert permanent supervision and management of the scheme.

Christine Fairfax.

Membership renewals

I would like to thank those of you who have renewed your VPC membership for 2003, and also those who so generously donated towards our Restoration Fund - all is most gratefully received.

There is still time to rejoin VPC if your renewal remains outstanding, but if you have not sent me your subscription by the end of April (or given it to me at the AGM on 6 April) I shall assume that you wish your membership to lapse, and your name will be deleted from our list (with thanks for your past support).

However, I do hope that I will hear from you.

Margaret Elvin

VPC days out - latest news

Contrary to information given in our last newsletter, on visits to Copped Hall this spring and Beth Chatto's garden this summer, the VPC now hopes to run two summer trips, to Audley End and Copped Hall.

It wasn't possible to organise a visit to Beth Chatto's garden this year, but we hope to do so next summer; and the trip to Copped Hall has been scheduled to coincide with a special Open Day on 31 August.

Below, Dinah Mullineux gives details of the coach trip to Audley End, near Saffron Walden, on 9 August.

Travel to Copped Hall will take a different form, as the VPC committee felt that the cost of coach tickets couldn't be justified when the estate is relatively close to where most VPC members live, and a visit may only take half a day. Therefore, it was decided that, though we would book a guided tour of the estate, it would be best if members made their way there by car, perhaps offering lifts to those without transport.

We'll be discussing this idea at the AGM on 6 April, to gauge the level of support for this trip prior to booking places on a guided tour; so if you have any ideas and suggestions regarding the visit, please bring them to the meeting! Details of final arrangements will be given in our next newsletter.

Ed.

Audley End

Audley End house dates from the early seventeenth century, and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was responsible for transforming the park to create the stunning walks and vistas which exist today. One can enjoy the lake, Parterre and wonderful Pond Garden roses. There is a waterwheel to admire, and circular walks for the more energetic. A gentle slope leads to the Temple of Concord, built to celebrate King George III's temporary recovery from madness.

Much work has been done to restore the park and the Victorian Gardens, including the great walled Kitchen Garden now managed by the Henry Doubleday Research Association, who grow and sell a wide range of organic produce. This garden was formally opened by Prince Charles in 2000, and thus became accessible to the public for the first time in 250 years. It includes an impressive 170-foot vinehouse, and the nearby Back Sheds and Bothy Rooms display aspects of life in the nineteenth century. The potting sheds, packing

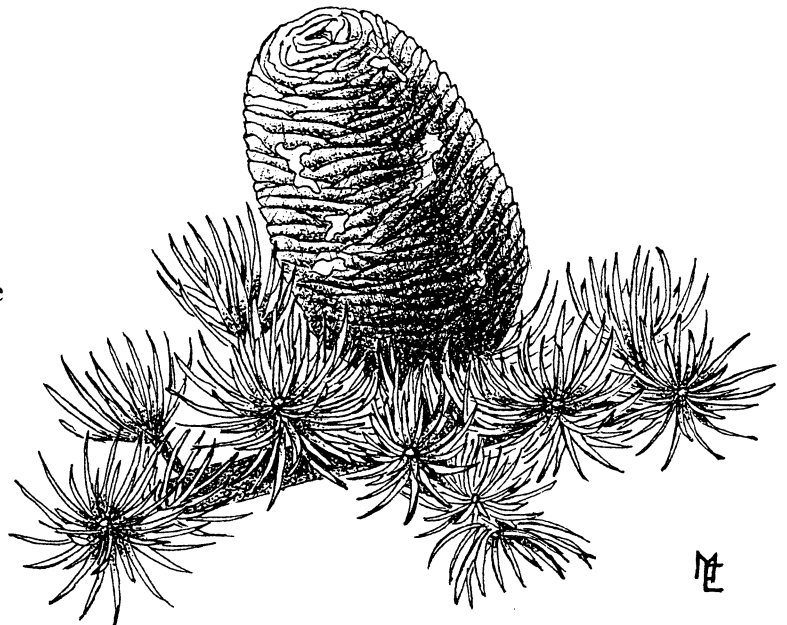
sheds, boiler house, mushroom house, toolshed and head gardener's office can all be visited.

The magnificent house has State Rooms in the Jacobean style, and paintings by Holbein, Lely and Canaletto. Introductory talks are available, to explain why Charles II described Audley as being "too large for a King, but might do for a Lord Treasurer". Facilities include picnic areas, restaurant, garden exhibition, guidebooks and shop.

Our visit is planned for Saturday 9 August. The day begins at 9.45am at the coach pick-up point in Clarence Avenue, Gants Hill, and we aim to leave Audley End around 5.30pm. Tickets are £13.50 full price, £12 concessions/child and £6.50 for English Heritage members. These sums cover the cost of the coach trip and entry to the house and gardens.

Please book tickets by Wednesday 21 May, using the enclosed form, and include a deposit of £5 per ticket (non-refundable unless the ticket can be resold). The balance will be paid on the coach on the day. Please make cheques payable to *Valentines Park Conservationists*, and send to me at

Dinah Mullineux



Seen in the park ...

Atlas Cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*)

By Margaret Elvin

More Valentines memories, from a distinguished supporter

Readers may recall that last year local historian and VPC member Herbert Hope Lockwood published *The Inspiration of Valentines*, in which he investigated the park's influence on the Anglo-American poet Denise Levertov. He later kindly allowed the VPC and the Friends of Valentines Mansion to share profits from the sale of the book.

The Inspiration of Valentines also contained reference to another Ilford poet, Dr Kathleen Raine CBE, founder of the Temenos Academy, a spiritual and philosophical association which has Prince Charles as its patron. On learning that Dr Raine was still living in London, Mr Lockwood sent her a copy of his book, and received a reply which included some of her early memories of the park:

" ... in my day (pre-1914 war) the waters of the wishing well ran clear, and the Grotto by the lake was a place of wonder ... I remember too the rhododendron thickets and the bird-song and a fragrance of leaves. There was I am sure a park-keeper in uniform. I seem to remember that the correct offering to throw in the wishing well was a bent pin. It has some-thing to do with ancient Egypt. Valentines Park had still an indescribable air of aristo-cracy ... Even now I sometimes dream of the lake."

Enclosed with Dr Raine's letter was a donation towards the restoration of the park, and in reply to thanks sent by our secretary Christine Fairfax she adds:

"I am so glad to know that [the park] remains an oasis, with some of its rare and beautiful old trees, and that the two lakes are returning to life ... I hope the wishing well will soon be restored to the purity I remember from eighty-five years ago. More indeed, I am now ninety-four and I knew the park before I was five."

We are very grateful for Dr Raine's contribution to the VPC's Restoration Fund, and for her interest in Valentines, and will be sending her copies of our newsletters to keep her up-to-date on developments within the park.

Karen Lane

The trees of Valentines Park III

Near the Cedar of Lebanon is another grand specimen, the Monkey Puzzle Tree (*Araucaria Araucaria*), a conifer with a regular and symmetrical pattern of branching and a bark bearing traces of leaves which once grew around the trunk. The fruit is a cone about four inches long, which disintegrates when ripe.

The tree is native to the mountainous region between Chile and Argentina, where it can grow to a height of 150 feet. Introduced to Britain at the end of the eighteenth century, it later became a popular choice for planting in early twentieth century suburban gardens. It is said to have gained its name from the chance remark at a tree-planting ceremony that "it would puzzle a monkey to climb that tree".

Growing close by are two interesting species of oak. The Turkey Oak (*Quercus Cerris*) has deeply-lobed, pointed leaves, with the acorn cup covered in downy, reflexed scales. Native to southern Europe and west Asia, it was introduced to England in 1735 for growing in parkland, but has since become naturalised.

The Holm Oak (*Quercus Ilex*) has small elliptical leaves which are glossy green above and downy underneath, and is unusual in being an evergreen oak. Its natural range is in the Mediterranean regions of Spain, north Africa and Asia Minor, as it grows well in dry situations. There is another Holm Oak in Valentines, situated beside the path between the aviary and the mansion.

Janet Plimmer

*Ten hardy souls braved extremely wet weather to take part in our **Treasure Hunt** in the park on Sunday 29 December, and were first of all rewarded by the rain holding off throughout the event! VPC member Colin Newman was the first to work out the final clue which led to the 'treasure', but there were plenty of consolations for the runners-up in the form of cakes and chocolates over a hot drink in the Pavilion café afterwards. All those who took part agreed it had been a most enjoyable event, so thanks to David Lane for all the effort he put in to making it a success.*

The famous Hampton Court (née Valentines) vine

The March 2003 issue of *Gardeners' World* magazine contains an article by horticultural journalist Martyn Cox about the vine at Hampton Court Palace. The article describes the expert and undivided attention which the vine receives from a full-time gardener, in order to produce a very large quantity of fine grapes, which are sold in the palace shop. As a new venture, cuttings are shortly to be grown, also for sale in the shop.

Martyn Cox visited Valentines during Open House weekend in September 2002, and enquired about the original vine, which was planted there in 1758. A cutting was later taken to Hampton Court, where it may have been planted by Capability Brown. Mr Cox's article mentions that the parent vine at Valentines later died, and that in 1988 some local schoolchildren arranged for a replacement cutting to be brought from Hampton Court for planting in Valentines' walled kitchen garden.

Maybe Martyn Cox's planned publicity was tempting fate, as before his article was printed, our vine in the walled garden fell victim to contractors' earth- and compost-moving operations. In late autumn 2002 we found it dead.

Digging and dredging

During torrential rain in November archaeologists dug trenches to identify the exact position of various early walls and paths in the formal gardens near the mansion. The eighteenth century layout in the walled kitchen garden was found to have been obscured by later building, but soil samples were taken for pollen analysis.

Some VPC members and parties of schoolchildren were guided round the various trenches, the most impressive containing the fine brickwork of buried sections of the Ha-Ha. This newly discovered Ha-Ha follows the western side of the Long Canal and Fishpond, and links together the two existing visible sections, so that the continuous structure would have protected all the formal gardens and lakes from grazing animals. The archaeologists also pointed out evidence of the ancient 'ridge and furrow' agricultural system in areas of the Glade.

December and January brought more mud and

mess, as lorries and cranes were active around the southern section of the Long Canal. A dam was created so that silt and leaves could be removed whilst retaining enough water in the northern section for fish to survive. Unfortunately, after water was pumped from the southern section and desilting began, the dam leaked badly, so that overall water levels were very low during the weekend in January when a change in the weather brought snow and ice. We were worried about the large golden carp and the darker tench: although the dam has been removed, the water level remains low and cormorants find easy pickings.

The brick walls of the Long Canal have recently been examined so that costings can be prepared for restoration work. It is evident that a conflict of interest exists between carrying out this work and protecting the trees which grow nearby. Some are fine old oaks probably planted around 1800, and others are rare specimens such as the two Swamp Cypress and the Japanese Pagoda Tree.

We look forward to the appointment of a discerning park manager, who will be suitably qualified to oversee all the restoration work and exercise the fine judgement needed to avoid collateral damage.

Gourmet feasting in the park!

Last autumn we planted lots of bulbs and corms around the mansion. The species which Stephen Smith chose for the Regency border included many crocuses. Unfortunately, these proved to be a popular gourmet delicacy for the park's squirrel population, who have enjoyed a feast throughout the winter. We have continually found the evidence, seeing freshly-dug little hollows in the soil, surrounded by lots of discarded little green bulb shoots.

Nearly 2000 crocuses were also planted in the turf on the Emerson Road side of the mansion, which we hope have survived with the protection of the grass.

At present many lovely snowdrops are in bloom, as these obviously don't appeal to squirrels. Regency period gardeners did not have the problem of grey squirrels, but other rodents also eat some bulbs. I wonder whether our native red squirrels like the taste of crocus?

Christine Fairfax

EVENTS DIARY

Saturday 29 March

General maintenance, planting and weeding in the Old English Garden and Rosery, 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet OEG.

Saturday 5 April

The Friends of Valentines Mansion Quiz Night.
Redbridge Institute of Adult Education, Gaysham Avenue, Gants Hill. 7.15pm for 7.45 start.

Tickets £6.50, to be bought in advance only - no admission on the night. Price includes either a fish, chicken, vegetarian burger or vegetarian pancake-roll supper.

For tickets or further information, please contact:
Mrs Margaret Teggan,

Tel (020) 8550

When ordering tickets, please state your choice of supper, and how many of each type you require. Please make cheques payable to *Friends of Valentines Mansion*, and enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Sunday 6 April

Annual General Meeting. Valentines Mansion, 2.30-4.30pm, with refreshments.

Followed by *Valentines in Living Memory.* Stephen Smith presents some rarely-seen slides of the park, from its heyday in the 1950s, '60s and early '70s, to the beginning of its decline in the 1980s. A fascinating and poignant review of the recent past.

Saturday 26 April

General maintenance, planting and weeding in the Old English Garden, Rosery and Regency border, 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet OEG.

Sunday 4 May

Summer migrant and nesting bird-watching with Peter Hopkins. Meet 8.00am by the Pavilion café. The walk should last between 1½ and two hours.

Saturday 10 May

May Fair. Valentines Mansion, 10.00am-5.00pm. Organised by the Friends of Valentines Mansion.

The VPC stall will display merchandise and information, and members will be on hand to give advice and answer queries on all aspects of the park.

Sunday 25 May

Redbridge Green Fair. Melbourne Field, Valentines Park, 11.30am-7.00pm.

The VPC tent will display merchandise and information, and members will be on hand to give advice and answer queries on all aspects of the park.

Saturday 31 May

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

Saturday 28 June and Saturday 26 July

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

Saturday 9 August

Coach trip to Audley End. Please see the article in this month's newsletter for further details.

Sunday 31 August

Visit to Copped Hall. Please see the article in this month's newsletter for further details.

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

CONTACTS

VPC Chairman

Stephen Smith - 020 8554

Secretary

Christine Fairfax - 020 8551

Treasurer

Gill Faul - 01992

Membership Secretary

Margaret Elvin - 020 8554

Press & Publicity

David Lane - 020 8554

Newsletter Editorial

Karen Lane - 020 8554