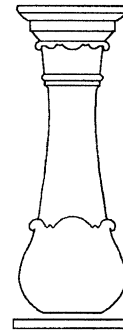


VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER

Honorary Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE



Issue no. 15 July 2003

Visit to Copped Hall, Sunday 31 August

As mentioned at our Annual General Meeting, the cost of hiring a coach for the short journey to Copped Hall proved prohibitive, but members agreed that it would be worth travelling there 'under our own steam'.

Anyone who showed an interest in the visit at the AGM will have been contacted by now, as we have a list of about 20 people who either need or can offer lifts. As travel arrangements are now being made, if anyone else is interested in coming but lacks transport please contact either Dinah Mullineux ((020) 8252) or Janet Plimmer (8554) by 10th August to see if a lift can be arranged. The pick-up point will be at the park's Emerson Road entrance at 11.00am unless individual drivers make other arrangements. Should members wish to make their own way there, the suggested route from Ilford is:

- Ilford to the Wake Arms roundabout on the Epping New Road (B1323) between Loughton and Epping.
- From there continue along the Epping New Road towards Epping.
- After about a mile you will see a left-hand turning towards Upshire. Take this turning, and about 200 yards along on the right-hand side you will see a pair of lodges with huge wrought iron gates. This is the entrance to Copped Hall. There is a large field for parking.

The Copped Hall Trust cannot offer a guided tour for all VPC members together, but will be delighted to welcome us on their Open Day, when a series of small-group guided tours will take place, including a tour of the 18th century walled garden.

Admission is £3 per person, payable on the gate. Refreshments are available, and attractions include an exhibition, tombola, and cakes and other produce for sale.

Dinah Mullineux

Valentines' forgotten feature

VPC member Peter Butt has recalled a feature of the park that has so far not been mentioned in our newsletter:

I recently attended an interesting talk about the park, given by Christine Fairfax to the Wives Group of Goodmayes Methodist Church. In one of the photograph albums that she brought along was a photo of the stream with its stepped concrete sides, where my brother and I used to catch 'tiddlers', and which flowed from the children's model yacht pond to the big boating lake.

This photo reminded me that on the stream's south side, amongst the trees, there had once been a narrow gauge (12 inch?) children's railway, which ran parallel to the stream. Christine hadn't heard of this railway, and so asked for my memories of it.

I was born in 1939 and lived in Chepstow Crescent, Newbury Park. Some three or four times a year I walked with my parents and elder brother to Valentines Park on a Sunday afternoon. On one particular visit we were excited at the prospect of riding on the new 'stream' train. This must have been sometime in the late 1940s, as the second World War had ended and I was still at primary school.

However, I recall being disappointed with the ride as the track was straight and could not have been very long - perhaps only 100 yards. The train left from near the big boating lake, ran to the other end of the track and then reversed, with just a couple of toots of its whistle.

I remember walking in the area some years later, when I was in my late teens or early twenties, and seeing the tracks still in the grass.

Peter J Butt

Does anyone else remember this railway, or have any more information about it? - Ed.

Annual General Meeting report

This year's AGM proved to be another enjoyable event with a good turn out of members. As far as the business side was concerned, one of the main proposals which received backing was to hold one or two 'open meetings', or forums, each year, to which all members are invited. These forums will be used to discuss and implement projects associated with the park's restoration and enhancement.

One project which could be discussed at a future forum is that of an exhibition on park life, to run alongside other events at the mansion. If it were to go ahead, volunteers will be invited to contribute towards, and co-ordinate the running of, this exhibition, with help from the local studies library.

For example, the VPC is interested in old photographs of the park - perhaps personal snaps which by their nature won't have been seen publicly before. These can be copied without the need for a negative now. We are also interested in collecting reminiscences about any aspect of Valentines. Or does anyone have programmes, press cuttings, admission tickets or other mementoes of events in the park? If there is sufficient support, this project will extend the role of the Conservationists beyond its current horticultural activities, thus perhaps involving members not currently taking part in this work.

As far as the past year's activities were concerned, the Rose Temple restored by local craftsman Jimmy Tait was welcomed, and work continues in locating a suitable urn for its centre. Mention was made of the progress in designing and building an Arts and Crafts bird-bath to replace the repositioned sundial from the Old English Garden.

The business meeting concluded with a presentation to Redbridge council, represented by Nigel Burch, of two prints donated by the VPC. One was a reproduction of a watercolour of the mansion and its immediate surroundings in the 1830s, the other an ordnance survey map showing the park in 1919. The framing was paid for by the VPC and it is hoped that in the not-too-distant future both these prints will be on display at the mansion.

After a lovely Sunday afternoon tea provided by Dinah and her team, the meeting concluded with a slide talk entitled *Valentines in Living Memory*.

Stephen Smith

Further mention must be made of Stephen's excellent presentation Valentines in Living Memory, based on

rarely-seen slides of the park, from its Edwardian beginnings, through its heyday in the 1950s, '60s and early '70s, to the beginning of its decline in the 1980s. The slides were accompanied by gasps and comments of recognition from the audience, as long-lost features appeared on screen, plus sighs of regret that so much has been lost from the park.

However, the point of Stephen's talk was that Valentines has, throughout its history, been replanted and remodelled according to changing horticultural fashions and leisure interests. Therefore, the VPC shouldn't try to recreate and preserve the park according to a non-existent ideal, but instead help renovate and adapt it to meet 21st century needs, while at the same time looking after the best from the past, whatever its era: something that will be possible if the Heritage Lottery Fund grant is awarded. An optimistic conclusion to an at times poignant review.

Karen Lane

The trees of Valentines Park IV

Two fruiting trees are of interest. The mulberry (*Morus Niger*) is situated near the mansion, in front of the aviary. It is native to central Asia - where it is widely cultivated for its fruit - and naturalised in southern Europe.

Our specimen is an interesting example of natural reproduction, as it has a spreading habit, and has rooted where its branches have drooped down and touched the ground, so that the old original trunk is now surrounded by rooted branches. These still crop heavily, the dark purple fruits being much enjoyed by starlings, blackbirds and climbing children!

In the spring of 2003 the council planted two young mulberry trees to replace the one which became uprooted when the ground was waterlogged in the winter of 2001-2.

There is also a fig (*Ficus Carica*) growing over the grotto shelter on the south side of the canal. The fig is thought to be native to an area ranging from Afghanistan to Syria, and is parthenocarpic - that is, it will develop fruit without fertilisation, so that even single trees can be grown for fruit.

The fig in Valentines is a variety known as Brown Turkey, and cropped every year (though the fruits only ripened in favourable summers), until it had to be severely cut back when a survey of the grotto's structure was carried out. It is now trying to regenerate, and we hope it will survive.

Janet Plimmer

Jazz on a summer's day

On Sunday 22 June the VPC ran one of its most successful events so far, when it hosted an afternoon of jazz in Valentines Mansion, as part of the Mid-summer Music Fest instigated by local musician and environmentalist Max Reid.

What had been the mansion's 'morning room', overlooking the Regency border, was filled to capacity for Who Else for Jazz, a four-piece outfit comprising drums, piano, clarinet and, on double bass, Gerald Elvin, husband of Margaret, our membership secretary.

The band played two 40-minute sets of mainstream classics by composers such as Cole Porter, Fats Waller and above all, Duke Ellington. These were interspersed by two leisurely tea breaks and a set by the seven-piece Barnabarians, featuring piano, wind and string sections and, once again, the indefatigable Gerald Elvin on double bass. The Barnabarians light, lilting arrangements of pieces on a summer theme contrasted well with the sparkling swing of Who Else for Jazz, whose second set earned them a well-deserved demand for an encore.

The windows of the morning room were open, and sounds of summer jazz floated out to the lawn beyond the Regency border, where people sat with rugs and chairs and picnics, relaxing in the sunshine and enjoying the music. Refreshments served by Dinah, Janet, Jenny, John and Joy included cold drinks and scones, jam and cream, which added to the summery mood, and the fact that the event was free, with people able to wander in and out of the mansion to listen wherever the fancy took them, made for a leisurely and enjoyable afternoon.

Many thanks to Who Else for Jazz, The Barnabarians, Dinah and her team, and everyone else who worked so hard to make the day a success. We have a feeling a repeat performance will be much in demand for next summer, if not before!

Karen Lane

Christine Fairfax adds: A most enjoyable and relaxing occasion. In its present grotty and dilapidated state, the mansion bears a strong resemblance to the many 'jazz dives' in dingy cellars that I frequented in my youth!

Seen in the park ...



Phlomis Fruticosa - 'Jerusalem Sage'

by Margaret Elvin

ME

Mr Alfred Taylor

We are sorry to report that Mr Alfred Taylor, former gardener at Valentines, died recently, aged 100. We had got to know him over the last year, and during several lively chats had enjoyed sharing many of his memories of Valentines Park.

We attended Mr Taylor's funeral service, during which his long-standing friend, Canon John Barnes, former vicar of St Mary's Ilford, spoke of Mr Taylor's pride in Valentines, where he spent almost half his working life, and of his sadness at its decline, but how he had been heartened to learn of the work of the VPC, and our hopes for the restoration of the park.

Janet and John Plimmer

UPGRADING VALENTINES: THE LATEST NEWS

Replacing the lost urns of Valentines

We have recently searched Redbridge's Local Studies archive for pictures of the urn which stood in the centre of the Rose Garden from the 1870s to 1991/2, and also the matching pair of urns which stood either side of a seat beside the Long Water, facing the Broadwalk in the Wilderness area.

We now have a detailed photograph from the 1970s, and a sketch by Valentines' last gardener, Peter Warren, dated 1984, of the Rose Garden urn. It is therefore possible to obtain castings for a replacement for this unusual urn, which was of a type fashionable when William Earley designed the garden in the 1870s.

Unfortunately the photographs that we found of the Long Water urns show insufficient detail to act as a guide for choosing replacements. But we estimate that the urns were five to six feet tall, with ornate handles, reliefs of serpents or lizards encircling the bowl, and large square pedestals.

We would be very grateful if anyone can supply information about the fate of these urns, or has any photographs or personal snaps which show them

fairly clearly. If you think you can help please contact me, Christine Fairfax, on (020) 8551 1563.

Surveying the park's wildlife

In April 2003 Redbridge's Area 7 committee agreed to allocate up to £8000 from their Discretionary Budget to pay for a professional environmental survey and management plan of the park. This should ensure that Heritage Lottery funding will not only restore the historic fabric of Valentines, but also benefit wildlife.

Stefania Horne and Danielle Jones of the borough's Nature Conservation team worked with us in obtaining and assessing suitable tenders from wildlife consultants. Andrew S Waller has now begun a survey which will include studies of the park's habitats, trees and other flora, plus bats, other mammals, birds and amphibians. Invertebrate specialist Colin Plant will survey insect species.

As this work will only last for about five months Andrew and Colin will be grateful for any data which local wildlife enthusiasts can provide. If anyone can offer information or would like to help with bat surveys or moth trapping, please contact me on (020) 8551

Latest plans for improving the park

The borough's Leisure Services department has recently told us of the following plans:

1. Eliminating the infestation of Japanese knotweed near the wishing well and ornamental pond will be treated as matter of urgency.
2. The grottoes and alcove seat will soon be fenced off to protect them from vandalism, prior to restoration.
3. Water in the Long Water will be raised to normal level, and engineers are investigating the possibility of recommissioning the old sluice gate.
4. Proposals are being finalised for future use of the walled kitchen garden and dovecote.

We will of course brief members further when more details are available.

Christine Fairfax

EVENTS DIARY

This year's Autumn planting project

This year our big 'all hands on deck' project will be to plant a yew hedge around the base of Valentines Mansion's old conservatory. This will complete our work on the east side of the mansion, which began with the Big Dig and replanting the Regency border in autumn 2001, and continued with bulb planting in this border and the conservatory flower bed in October 2002. Work will start at 10.30am and finish by 1.30pm, and refreshments will be provided. All are welcome, for as long as you can spare!

Stephen Smith

Saturday 26 July 2003

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

Saturday 9 August

Coach trip to Audley End. Coach now full. Pick-up point: Clarence Avenue, Gants Hill at 9.45am *sharp*. Coach leaves Audley End around 5.30pm.

Sunday 17 August

A stroll through Central Park, Ilford. Stephen Smith leads a walk to look at the Victorian layout and planting schemes in the part of Valentines purchased by the council in 1899. Meet 3.00pm by the Pavilion café. The tour will last approximately one hour.

Saturday 30 August

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

Sunday 31 August

Visit to Copped Hall. Leaves from Emerson Road park entrance at 11.00am. Please see the article in this month's newsletter for further details.

Saturday 20 & Sunday 21 September

Open House weekend. Valentines Mansion will be open from 11.00am-5.00pm as part of Redbridge's contribution to London Open House.

Essex Art Club will be holding an exhibition of paintings, and the Friends of Valentines Mansion

will have a stall displaying merchandise and information. Members will also be on hand to give advice and answer queries on all aspects of the mansion.

Saturday 27th September

Bulb planting and early Autumn work in the Old English Garden and Regency border, 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet Regency border, by the mansion.

Thursday 16 October

East India connections in Redbridge. A talk by local historian Georgina Green. Find out about the many retired ship-owners, captains, governors and directors of the East India Company who lived in the area. 8.00pm, St Mary's Church, Woodford. Please call Georgina on (020) 8500 for more information and tickets, priced £4.50. Proceeds to be divided between the Friends of Valentines Mansion and The Children's Society.

Saturday 25th October

Autumn planting project: putting a yew hedge round the old conservatory base. 10.30am-1.30pm, refreshments provided. Meet at the mansion. All welcome!

Saturday 29th November

Putting the borders to bed: tidy-up and winter preparation of the Regency border, Old English Garden and Rose Temple beds, 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet Regency border, by the mansion.

VPC Chairman

Stephen Smith - 020 8554

Secretary

Christine Fairfax - 020 8551

Treasurer

Gill Faul - 01992

Membership Secretary

Margaret Elvin - 020 8554

Press & Publicity

Julie Bradley - 020 8554

Catering & Events

Dinah Mullineux - 020 8252

Newsletter Editorial

Karen Lane - 020 8554