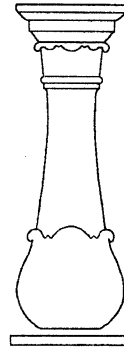


# VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER

Honorary Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE



Issue no. 17 March 2004

## This year's AGM

Our AGM will be held on 25 April, and comes at a time when the park's Heritage Lottery Fund bid will be in its final stages. What will this mean for the Conservationists? What role will we play in the park's restoration and what sort of say will we have in how the money will be spent?

With these questions in mind we've invited James Wisdom, chairman of the Friends of Gunnersbury Park and Museum, to be our guest speaker at this year's meeting. James will give us the benefit of his group's experiences during the restoration of Gunnersbury Park. Situated in the suburbs of west London, this park is similar in scale to Valentines, and has all the advantages and problems associated with historic public parks. In fact, Gunnersbury has two mansions, to our one!

Being ahead of us in the Lottery game, James' experience will be invaluable as we embark on what we know will be an eventful period.

Please come to hear about Gunnersbury, pose your questions, and enjoy our Sunday afternoon tea at the mansion. We look forward to seeing you.

*Stephen Smith*

## 2004 coach outing

This year the VPC plans to visit the Roman city of Colchester and Beth Chatto Gardens, on Saturday 24 July. We will leave Clarence Avenue, Gants Hill at 9.30am, and travel first to Colchester, where there are attractive gardens leading down to the River Colne, and plenty to see in the castle and museum. Other places of interest are the Natural History Museum, Sensory Garden, Tymperleys Clock Museum, and Hollytrees Museum, which gives an insight into life in Colchester over the past 300 years.

There are many places to have lunch or a snack, and for interested shoppers there is a market in the

city centre. We will leave Colchester at 1.30pm to visit Beth Chatto Gardens at Elmstead Market. These incorporate different areas of interest, such as woodland and water, and the gravel garden will provide information and ideas should our own gardens suffer a repeat of last summer's heat and dryness. There will be plants for sale, and the Tea Room offers hot and cold drinks, locally made cakes and ice cream, and a selection of filled rolls.

Tickets for the day cost £11 each. Please book by 22 May using the enclosed form, and include a deposit of £5 per person (non-refundable unless the ticket/s can be re-sold). The balance will be collected on the coach on the day. Please make cheques payable to *Valentines Park Conservationists*, and send to Mrs D Mullineux,

*Dinah Mullineux*

## Valentines' fame spreads

A few weeks ago I received an e-mail from Hazelle Jackson, author of *Shell Houses and Grottoes* (Shire Books, September 2001), and editor of *London Landscapes*, the newsletter of the London Parks and Gardens Trust.

She has long been a fan of Valentines Park, and had recently spoken to English Heritage staff about the restoration of the grottoes in the park. As a result of their conversation, Hazelle has included an article about the grottoes, together with illustrations provided by the architects responsible for their restoration, in the March 2004 issue of *London Landscapes*.

You can find out more about the London Parks and Gardens Trust by writing to The Membership Secretary, London Parks and Gardens Trust, Duck Island Cottage, c/o The Store Yard, St James's Park, London SW1A 2BJ, or visiting the website <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/london.gardens/>

*Karen Lane*

## Result of the HLF bid

In March 2004 the borough's Leisure Services managers expect to hear the result of their Stage 2 application for an award from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the park's restoration.

Last autumn members received a letter from the VPC committee advising them of a brief opportunity to see and comment on the detailed proposals for the park, which were presented at the mansion by Land Use Consultants on 20 and 21 September 2003.

The committee did not agree with certain features of the plan, particularly the siting of a café in the old walled kitchen garden. The position chosen for the café was formerly graced by the famous 18th century Valentines grapevine, a cutting from which was later taken to Hampton Court. This south-facing wall is the ideal place for nurturing the replacement cutting from Hampton Court, which was planted in the walled garden in 1988, and which is struggling to stay alive.

We understand that an overview of comments received from the public have been passed to the HLF together with Land Use Consultants' proposals. We eagerly await its decisions regarding the allocation of approximately £3 million for the park and, if it's awarded, how the money will be spent.

*Christine Fairfax*

## Valentines' miniature railway (cont.)

*Further to articles about the park's miniature railway in previous newsletters, VPC member Peter Butt has some more details and suggestions:*

The track was still in situ in 1954, as a friend who moved to Ilford as a child in 1954 recalls seeing it, but never saw a train running on it.

As a suggestion, does a member of the VPC have an interest in metal detecting, as surely there could well be relevant detritus around the area of the track? In fact, is the track still there, having just been buried over time? I have a friend who is a member of a local metal detecting group, who I am sure would be happy to 'sweep' the area, given authorisation.

*I too wondered if it would be worth conducting an archaeological dig where the railway ran, to see if any of the track remains buried there. However, VPC member Roger Backhouse tells me that this was almost certainly a portable structure which was taken up at*

*the end of each summer season, and that the only part of the railway which might remain is the cinder base on which the track was laid.*

*But is there a chance that the track wasn't removed after the railway's final season, as the recollection of Peter Butt's friend suggests? And would there be any problems with conducting a metal-detecting 'sweep'? - Ed.*

## Jazz at the mansion II

Toe-tapping, finger-clicking, joint-jumping jazz was the order of the night when *Who Else For Jazz?* returned to the mansion in January for their second concert. A capacity crowd - we could have sold many more tickets if the mansion had the space - enjoyed almost two hours of swing and Duke Ellington standards - not to mention some extremely suspect jokes!

A fantastic support act - Dinah, Janet, Jenny and John - made sure the audience, the band and all those involved in organising the event were well supplied with food and drink.

Add Christine's decorations, which created a pleasantly seedy jazz club atmosphere, and it's no surprise that everyone went home whistling or humming their favourite tunes - a sure sign of a good musical evening. And with over £200 raised for our restoration work, this was a good evening for the park too. *Who Else for Jazz?* Well, me for one!

*David Lane*

## Membership renewals

We thank those VPC members who have renewed their subscriptions for this year, and for all donations towards our Restoration Fund.

Outstanding subscriptions from members who joined before October 2003 can be either be sent to me at

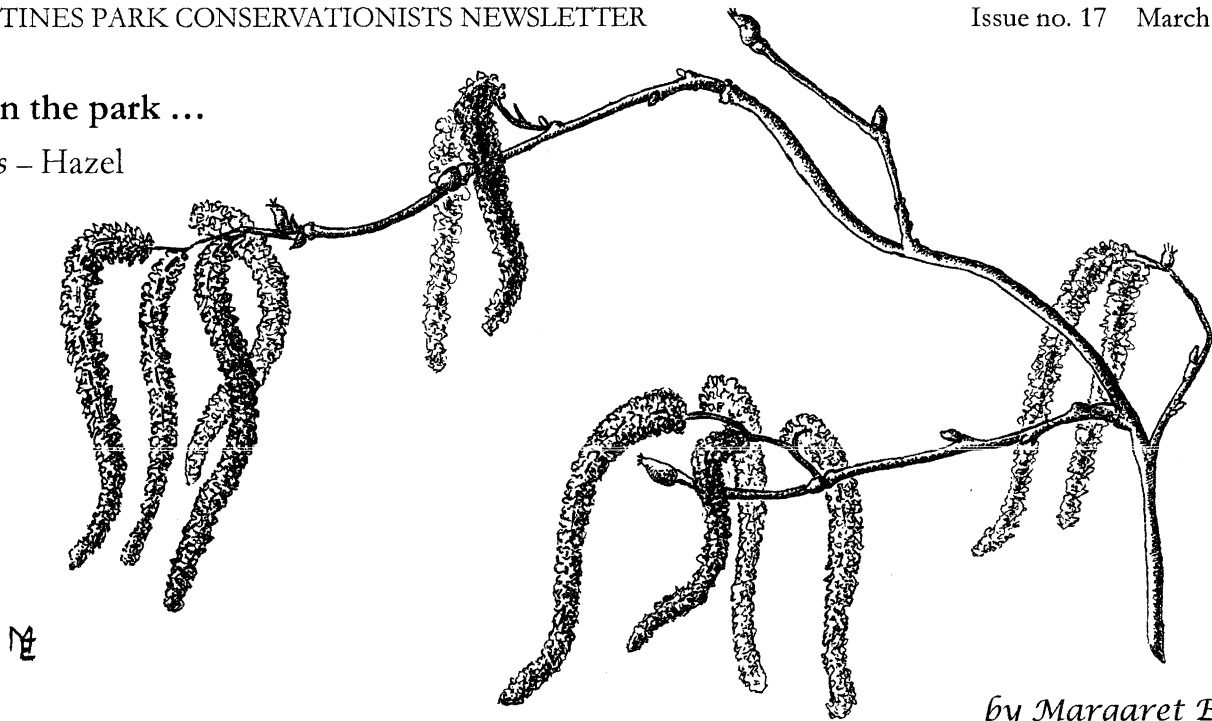
\_\_\_\_\_, or paid at our AGM on 25 April, otherwise your name will be removed from our membership list at the end of April.

The support received from members past and present is very much appreciated.

*Margaret Elvin*

## Seen in the park ...

*Corylus* – Hazel



by Margaret Elvin

## Valentines' sundial pedestal in peril

Valentine's beautiful sundial pedestal is probably about 250 years old. Stephen Smith, thinks it probably dates from Sir Charles Raymond's time as owner of the mansion, when the pedestal's graceful acanthus leaves decoration would have been regarded as a subtle reminder of classical Roman times.

Sadly, on Christmas day the pedestal was knocked off its plinth by vandals, and later proved too heavy to move without specialist lifting gear.

While awaiting repair to the damage caused, it remained where it had fallen, near the centre of the turning circle by the mansion. Unfortunately, vandals returned on the night of 7 February. It seems they dropped the pedestal on the stone plinth while trying to lift it, thereby breaking chunks off. They then used these bits to shatter glass and damage the woodwork of the mansion's main door.

We are indebted to the presence of mind of VPC member Julie Bradley, who noticed the damage on 8 February whilst walking her dog. Fearing loss of the broken pieces, she hid them in the Regency border - appropriately enough, under the leaves of an acanthus plant! She then raised the alarm, and we arranged for the park keepers to assess the damage and take the broken pieces into storage.

We hope that repairs to the pedestal will take place soon. The original metal sundial which was fixed on top is in Redbridge's local history museum. Following the restoration of the park and mansion, we hope a replica will be fitted to the restored pedestal.

Christine Fairfax

## The trees of Valentines Park VI

So far, we've looked at some interesting trees within the gardens around the mansion, so branching out (sorry!) and moving into the wider park, a specimen worthy of note is a very old Field Maple (*Acer campestre*), which can be found on the corner between the pitch-and-putt and one of the smaller cricket pitches. The site of this venerable tree is probably an old field boundary dating from when the area was under cultivation as part of Middlefield Farm. The Field Maple is a native British tree, but it also grows throughout most of Europe and western Asia. Its leaves are deciduous and typically maple-shaped, the flowers small and yellowish-green, appearing quite late in May, and the seeds have helicopter-like wings to aid air-borne distribution. The wood is the hardest of all maples, and is used, for example, to make musical wind instruments.

Growing alongside the brook are several Alders (*Alnus glutinosa*). This is another native British tree which also grows throughout Europe. It likes moist areas alongside water, where it can form stilt roots similar to those of tropical trees. Its leaves are deciduous, roundish, and sticky when young. The tree bears both male and female catkins, and the seeds, which are a good food source for birds, can be distributed by adjacent water. The wood, although fragile and prone to rot, has some commercial use, mainly in the manufacture of plywood, matches and pencils. An example of this species giving its name to a local area is Aldersbrook, near Wanstead Park, where the trees grow alongside the River Roding.

Janet Plimmer

## Valentino the Mediterranean Gull (a special winter visitor)

Those of you who have been kind enough to join me on a winter bird-walk may have seen Valentino the Mediterranean Gull, a winter holiday-maker here for the fifth year.

When I say this is his fifth year, he could have been coming for much longer. I first saw him as an adult bird in 2000, but as these gulls can live for twenty-odd years, he could know the park better than me. You might ask why 'he'? Well, it all has to do with comparing certain feathers' length with other certain feathers' length (alright, don't doze off!).

The Med Gull has a scientific name, *Larus melanocephalus*, which is from the Greek for black-headed gull or seabird. You may be thinking we already have a Black-headed Gull, and we have: *Larus ridibundus*, which means 'laughing gull', and to further complicate things there's another one actually called a Laughing Gull, which we don't get. Get it?

Now in breeding plumage, the Black-headed Gull has a brown head, but the Med has a beautiful jet-black head, the colour of which is just coming through now and will be almost complete when he packs off. The head in winter is similar to the Black-headed, with a dark smudge behind the eye, but as spring nears that black comes through.

The upperpart, or back, is a much paler silvery grey and the wings have no discernable dark feathers. This means that when the bird is at rest its rear is totally white, unlike the Black-headed Gull. This is the easiest way to spot one. If you see one in flight, the underwing is snow-white (no dark wedge) and the wings are shorter and not as pointed at the Black's. He also has a heavier bill, which is blood-red with a black band just before the tip, and red legs - a bit like my summer plumage!

Like any Latin lover, ours likes a bit of jewellery. On his left leg he sports a metal ring, alas too small to read, and on his right a green plastic ring with the registration 3CM6. All we know so far is that he was marked in Calais. He could summer in the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, Yugoslavia, or anywhere in between.

I hope he's still around when you read this. If not,

you'll have to wait until next October (about the 20th) to see him near the island end of the Boating Lake or on Melbourne Field (he really is that reliable - like all men!)

*Peter Hopkins*

Please feel free to forward any bird enquiries and details of interesting or unusual sightings to

## A des res for house sparrows

House sparrows were once common birds which everyone took for granted. Now, due to various factors, such as changes in farming practices, they are in massive decline nationally. A survey of the London boroughs has shown that Redbridge has more sparrows than most other areas in and around the capital, but they need help to survive.

So, thanks to John Boothe, who made some 'terrace' nest boxes based on an RSPB design, and Peter Knight, who is adept with ladders and the required tools, we have fixed four 'terraces' (each comprising three nest boxes) in the park.

Sparrows are sociable birds who like to nest near one another and colonise areas near people. Having noted their whereabouts in 2003, we have fixed a few boxes to the Pavilion café, and we hope this will meet with their approval.

*Christine Fairfax*

## If in doubt, ask!

I am often in our park, and have been amazed by people's acceptance of the things that go on.

For example, one Saturday at the end of January Christine Fairfax and I, together with some others, were putting up bird boxes, which involved carrying a large ladder and several buckets of tools from one end of the park to the other. Apart from the lady in the café, who later heard our drill, not one person asked us what we were doing or if we had permission to do it.

Come on people, I'm not saying you should be rude, but an enquiry or two might stop some of the vandalism and theft which goes on. A polite question shouldn't get anyone into trouble.

*Julie Bradley*

## EVENTS DIARY

### **Publicity: volunteers wanted**

Are any members willing to put posters advertising VPC events in their house or car windows? In future we may also produce 'flyers' publicising events: could any of you deliver these to other members, or to nearby houses? Also, if anyone has contacts or ideas regarding publicity, please contact me on 020 8554 after 6.00pm.

*Julie Bradley*

### **Sunday 14 March**

*A spring walk through Valentines.* Stephen Smith leads a walk taking in the early flowering plants, as well as anticipating the season to come. Meet 3.00pm by the Pavilion café. The walk will last about 45 minutes.

### **Saturday 27 March**

*Quiz Night.* Organised by the Friends of Valentines Mansion. 7.15pm, Redbridge Institute of Adult Education, Gaysham Avenue, Gants Hill. Tickets £7.50, in advance only from Miss Sheila Smith,

(020) 8478 Please choose a supper - either chicken, fish, vegetarian burger or vegetarian pancake roll (all with chips) - for each person when ordering tickets.

### **Sunday 11 April**

*Easter birdwalk with Peter Hopkins.* 2.00-3.00pm. Following the success of Peter's afternoon walk in December, another is being held on Easter Sunday, to look at spring visitors to the park. Meet 2.00pm by the Pavilion café.

### **Sunday 25 April**

*Annual General Meeting.* 2.30-4.30pm, Valentines Mansion. A short business meeting will be followed by refreshments and a presentation by James Wisdom, of the Friends of Gunnersbury Park and Museum, who will talk about the restoration of that park following a Heritage Lottery Fund award.

### **Saturday 15 May**

*May Fair.* Organised by the Friends of Valentines Mansion. 10.00am-5.00pm, Valentines Mansion. Arts and crafts, music, presentations, displays, refreshments, and more. Admission 50p.

### **Sunday 16 May**

*Birdwatching with Peter Hopkins.* 8.30-10.00am. Peter leads another of his popular Sunday morning walks. Meet 8.30am by the Pavilion café.

### **Saturday 19 June**

*Visit to Eaton Square, London SW1.* Stephen Smith leads a tour of one of west London's famous squares. Stephen has recently overseen a Regency-style restoration of this square, as part of his work for the Duke of Westminster's estate. Meet 2.30pm, Sloane Square Station (Circle and District lines).

### **Saturday 24 July**

*Coach trip to Colchester and Beth Chatto Gardens.* Coach leaves Clarence Avenue, Gants Hill at 9.30am. Tickets £11 each, in advance only (£5 deposit, remainder paid on the day) from Mrs Dinah Mullineux, 10 Glenham Drive, Gants Hill, . Tel: (020) 8252 . Please see the enclosed form for further details.

### **Regular VPC work days**

General maintenance and seasonal work in the Old English Garden, Regency Border and Rose Temple on the last Saturday of each month. Helpers welcome any time between 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet at the Old English Garden. Forthcoming workdays: **27 March, 24 April, 29 May, 26 June and 31 July**

#### **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