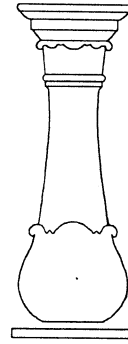


VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER

Honorary Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE



www.valentinespark.org.uk

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In the Wash weekend postponed

This summer has been a particularly busy one for the VPC committee. The monthly meetings with the Redbridge parks team have meant that committee members have put in a great deal of extra work, though it's something we've been happy to do. At last the opinions of the group are being listened to and Gary Meeds' appointment as Valentines Park Project Manager has led to some real movement with the restoration process.

However, one victim of all this activity has been this autumn's special planting project, our *In the Wash* weekend, which we have had to postpone. Whilst the Wash planting proposals had been carefully thought out, several factors - such as time, the council's requirement for formal planting plans and the phasing of planting to coincide with proposed waterway restoration - have prompted us to delay this project for a while. As the flesh is put on the bones of the restoration proposals, the need for us to fit our activities into the park's management plan and its evolving timetable of works has become increasingly important.

Stephen Smith

We hope to run our In the Wash weekend soon, and will publish details in a future newsletter once the event has been rescheduled - Ed.

Conservationists and council liaison

The VPC committee has met restoration project manager Gary Meeds and many of his colleagues several times since the last newsletter was published. Indeed, sometimes it seems like we've reached the stage of 'if it's Wednesday, it must be a liaison group meeting!' The VPC's discussions and planning prior to, each meetings are paying off and we hope we have made constructive suggestions regarding the tree strategy, the area around the mansion, and more general aspects of the park's restoration, such as environmental improvements. The only area where significant differences have arisen is over a few of the architects' proposals for the mansion's

restoration. We have argued against plans for additional paths to the west of the mansion and the removal of the beds to the south and east, as these are not necessary or historically valid. We will continue to press for the park's restoration plans to be given priority in these areas.

Having said that, the committee has a good working relationship with Gary and the council. We will be building on this by putting forward the VPC's views on how the park restoration should proceed, and working with Gary to see how our practical work can help or complement the Heritage Lottery Fund programme.

At our next council liaison meeting, on 16 November, we will be discussing the walled garden, so if you have any views on how this area should be restored and developed, please contact me or one of the other committee members. Similarly, if you would like any more details of the meetings, please get in touch.

David Lane

Membership renewals

With annual membership of the VPC lapsing on 31 December 2005, I hope you will decide to renew your subscription and so continue supporting the Conservationists' work in 2006. Please complete the enclosed renewal slip and return it to me with your subscription (unchanged at £6, or £3.50 unwaged), together with any donation you make wish to make to the VPC's Restoration Fund. Newer members who joined on or after 1 October this year need not renew, as your subscription covers the whole of 2006. The committee thanks you for your interest in the park and the VPC's efforts to help secure a healthy future for it, as we look forward to the restoration work beginning.

Margaret Elvin

Hedge the Edge revisited

Over the weekend of 27-28 November 2004 many VPC members participated in our project to plant a mixed native-species hedge along the Emerson Road railings in front of Valentines Mansion.

We are pleased that most of the 280 plants have survived their first season. On Saturday 26 November we plan to replace the twelve plants which have died with some spares which we've 'nursed' elsewhere for this purpose. If any members would like to see the results of their work last year, and/or help with our end of year tidy-up, they are most welcome to join us for this and our al-fresco coffee break.

The species planted were mainly hawthorn and blackthorn, with a smaller number of field maple, spindleberry and guelder rose. During recent discussions with park project manager Gary Meeds it was suggested that one or two of the tree species should be allowed to grow as standards, while most of the hedge would be kept to under five feet to enable people to see the mansion while walking along Emerson Road. Once mature, the hedge will enhance security and be good for wildlife. Thanks to everyone who helped plant it.

Christine Fairfax

Key issues in restoration

At the end of September I spent a few days in Turin where I had been invited to speak at an international conference on the restoration of historic gardens. Along with a French colleague from Versailles, I had been asked to relate my experiences of garden restoration while working for the Grosvenor Estate in London. One of the themes of the conference was the education of gardeners and their role in interpreting historic landscapes. I reflected on my apprenticeship at Valentines and the near-extinction today of such a traditional start in horticulture. I spoke of Grosvenor's success in recruiting people from other professional backgrounds to retrain in horticulture and the benefits of doing this.

What struck a chord with the conference delegates was the statement that without skilled and motivated gardeners being central to the restoration process, there is no point in embarking on it. Too many had seen millions of euros wasted on sophisticated schemes, the end result of which was little more than an arrangement of dead plants, because gardeners had been given no 'ownership' of projects before, during or after the work was carried out. Even closely-associated professionals such as landscape architects have often failed to communicate with those who are most important to the success of a project - the horticulturists.

So what's the lesson for Valentines? It doesn't take much to spot that the major reason why Valentines needs drastic restoration now is the loss of permanent gardening staff about twenty years ago. The employment and involvement of gardeners who will see through the restoration (and beyond) will be one of the parks team's most important tasks and the one they will have to get right if our discussions are not just to be hot air. We'll keep you posted!

Stephen Smith

This summer's visit to Mottisfont Abbey

It's great: for the third year running, we can say what glorious weather we had for the VPC's annual coach outing. The day at Mottisfont gave so much pleasure, with the beautiful grounds and walled gardens displaying wonderful roses, including many of the old fashioned perfumed varieties, and brilliantly-coloured herbaceous perennials. Many in our party enjoyed peaceful walks by the river and through cool woodland, but for anyone wishing to be really cool the 800 year old cellarium, with its stone columns and vaulted roof, provided just what was needed. In addition to the paintings within the house, we had the extra treat of a special exhibition of floral art. With so much to see the day flew by.

An extra bonus was that our chairman Stephen Smith joined us, having managed to get time off from his busy schedule of keeping the Grosvenor Estate gardens in order. We were also joined by Rita and Paul Coleman, members from the very beginning of the VPC who now live in Wales, and John Manuel (chairman of the Valentines Mansion Trust) and his wife Audrey, who were on holiday nearby.

We hope to repeat the success of our previous outings in 2006, and are currently considering a number of venues for our next trip. Please see our next newsletter for further details.

Dinah Mullineux

Valentines bat survey

As a prerequisite to the start of repairs to the grottoes and old walls and tree pruning and felling in the park, project manager Gary Meeds recently commissioned a bat survey. This was carried out from 14-17 October by Alison Fure of Redbridge's Nature Conservation Team, who some VPC members will know from the bat walks she's led.

Some of our members and other local volunteers helped with the survey. We were stationed at several park locations at dawn and dusk, and equipped with detectors to pick up the bats' echo-location ultrasounds. The objective was to note the time of the first activity at each site, and to try and identify any

roosts and flight paths. In October, bats mate after their usual feeding sessions and the sounds picked up on the detectors were particularly amazing!

Before beginning the survey Alison examined various sites, particularly older trees, for signs of roosting (such as droppings), and met the borough's tree officer, Peter Marshall, to discuss how the park's trees might be managed to benefit bats. Between the dusk and dawn surveys she spent the nights at the mansion, in a sleeping bag on the floor of the 'Surman room'. It's a hard life being a bat specialist!

Christine Fairfax

A new wood for London

In our July 2004 newsletter I reported that the Woodland Trust was proposing to create a new London wood, by buying 130 acres of farmland adjacent to its existing Hainault Forest site and planting the area with native-species trees. On behalf of the VPC committee I wrote to support this project. This July Nick Morgan, the Trust's South-East Regional Development Officer, wrote to tell me that over £1,115,000 had been raised through its campaigning, and so the extension to the Hainault Forest site would definitely be going ahead.

The Trust will keep me updated on the project's progress, and hopes to encourage local community involvement. To mark the centenary of the opening of Hainault Forest to the public, on Saturday 15 July 2006 the Trust will be celebrating up on Cabin Hill, just as the original conservationists did 100 years ago. Nick Morgan is 'sure that the great Edward North Buxton and Earl Carrington would approve of us continuing their great work [in] restoring more of this great 'lost forest'. Well, we certainly do!

Margaret Elvin

The Bishop's Walk

The Bishop's Walk is one of the park features which is due to be restored using Heritage Lottery funding. Old photographs show it as a long raised walkway between an avenue of yew trees (all but two of which were cut down in the 1970s), with a mount at each end. As people promenaded along the Bishop's Walk, they could glimpse the Long Canal fleetingly between the trees, and from the centre of the Walk they could look along three radiating paths, laid out in 'goosefoot' form, to the alcove grotto, rose garden and urns on the far side of the canal.

Looking in the other direction, one now sees the Valentines High School playing fields, but during the period 1724-54 Robert Surman, owner of Valentines Mansion, could look out over his 'Figure Field'. We know that Surman had statues in the

garden of his previous house in Wanstead, and that he kept some of these when that house was sold. Tastefully displayed statues, made of lead or marble, were fashionable in Surman's time, and it's possible that in addition to those in the Figure Field, two were displayed on the mounts at either end of the Bishop's Walk, as the dark green of yew was regarded as the ideal foil for showing off statuary.

Several people have suggested possible origins for the name 'Bishop's Walk', which appears to date from around the time the mansion was built, in 1696. I believe the most likely candidate for this dedication is not Archbishop Tillotson, who died in 1694, or Bishop Ken, but Henry Compton, Bishop of London from 1675 to 1713. At that time the Diocese of London included Essex. Unlike most bishops, Henry Compton carried out many of his 'visitation duties' personally, and he certainly toured the area, calling his clergy to regular conferences.

Bishop Compton was a keen botanist and passionate gardener. His diocese also included the Americas and the West Indies, to which he appointed chaplains and missionaries who were often keen botanists who introduced rare plants to his garden at Fulham Palace. At his death in 1713, this garden was thought to have a greater variety of exotic plants and trees than any other in England, and Bishop Compton is now regarded as a significant figure in garden history. Several plants bear his name, and some notable gardeners and designers, such as George London and Adam Holt, began their careers with him at Fulham Palace.

The ancient moat at Fulham Palace has been filled in, but a pathway called the Bishop's Walk remains.

Christine Fairfax

Seen in the park ...



*Quercus ilex - 'Holm oak'
by Margaret Elvin*

EVENTS DIARY

Redbridge council are planning some park-related events for the new year. The first of these will be a free Open Day in Valentines Mansion in late January, featuring displays and presentations on how the council plans to use the park's £3 million Heritage Lottery Fund award, and the tree strategy for Valentines, plus a visit by a guest speaker from a London borough which has already successfully restored its park using HLF money.

The park's Project Manager Gary Meeds is also planning a 45-minute guided tour of Valentines to outline some of the council's ideas for the park. The provisional date for this is Sunday 12 March, but we will send out confirmation of this and the January Open Day once we have more details.

Sunday 13 November

Birdwatching with Peter Hopkins. Peter leads another of his walks to look at some of the autumn migrants and resident species which should be in the park at this time of year. 8.30-10.30am. Meet by the Pavilion café.

Saturday 26 November

Putting the beds to sleep for the winter. End-of-year maintenance in the Old English Garden, Regency Border and Rose Temple. Plus replanting to fill a few gaps in the mixed-species hedge by the Emerson Road railings. Helpers always welcome for any amount of time between 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet by the Old English Garden.

Sunday 1 January 2006

Valentines' What and When Walk. Come and test your knowledge of some of the park's historic features in another of our popular New Year walks and quizzes. Nothing too difficult, and rewards for all at the end! Meet 2.00pm at the Pavilion café. The walk should last about an hour.

Saturday 7 January

A Tribute to Mrs Ingleby. Organised by the Friends of Valentines Mansion. 7.30pm, Valentines Mansion. An evening of mixed entertainment to celebrate the life of Mrs Ingleby, noted philanthropist and last private owner of the mansion. Tickets £10, including a finger buffet with wine or soft drinks, from Mrs Cherry Hooker,
Tel: (020) 8554

Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope with your booking and make cheques payable to *Friends of Valentines Mansion*.

Saturday 25 February

Late winter tidy-up and hardy annual planting. In the Old English Garden, Regency Border and Rose Temple. Help always welcome between 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet by the Old English Garden.

Sunday 12 March (provisional date)

Valentines: Projects, Plans and Proposals. Tour of the park organised by Redbridge Leisure Services, outlining some of the council's plans for restoring Valentines using the Heritage Lottery Fund award. Confirmation of the date and further details in our next newsletter, due out in early March 2006.

Saturday 25 March

Preparing for spring. Tidying up, pruning and manuring in the Old English Garden, Regency Border and Rose Temple. Help always welcome, 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet by the OEG.

Sunday 9 April

VPC Annual General Meeting. Valentines Mansion, 3.00-5.00pm. A short business meeting will be followed by refreshments and a presentation by a guest speaker. Further details in our next newsletter, due out in March 2006.

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