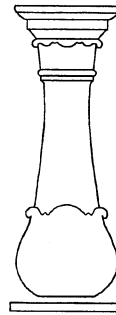


# VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER

Honorary Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE



[www.valentinespark.org.uk](http://www.valentinespark.org.uk)

Issue no. 23 March 2006

## Our Annual General Meeting

The 2006 AGM has been set for 9 April and will follow the now familiar format of a short business meeting followed by a presentation by a visiting speaker. This year's guest will be Gary Meeds, Valentines Park Project Manager, who many of you will have met during his first few months' work overseeing the park's restoration. He has previously worked on the restoration of Finsbury Park, and I hope he will bring to the meeting a practical insight into how he has achieved his goals in the past, and his vision of what will be achieved at Valentines in the future. This presentation to the group will be the first time Gary has had the opportunity to speak to the VPC en masse and I hope you will take the opportunity to come along and find out what he has to say, ask him questions and generally make him feel welcome.

At the meeting we will elect a new committee for 2006-07. I'm pleased to say that all the current committee members are able to continue next year with the exception of Christine Fairfax, who stood down as Secretary in January. I'd like to thank Christine for her many years of invaluable work on the committee, and look forward to her continuing involvement in our monthly gardening days.

*Stephen Smith*

## Outing to the Wimpole Estate, 8 July

Having travelled quite a distance for our visit to Mottisfont Abbey last summer, we have decided on a venue nearer home this year - the Wimpole Estate at Arrington, near Cambridge.

This estate was bequeathed to the National Trust by Elsie Bambridge, daughter of Rudyard Kipling. The Hall is the largest house in Cambridgeshire, and dates back some 300 years. It has an elegant book room, a spectacular yellow drawing room and unusual bath house, all designed by Sir John Soane; an impressive library designed by James Gibbs and housing over 10,000 books; and a chapel magnificently painted by James Thornhill.

The gardens vary from a formal Victorian parterre (at the time of our visit hopefully displaying pelargoniums and salvias) to a Dutch garden, Pleasure Grounds with many unusual species of trees, and a restored walled garden abundant with seasonal fruit and vegetables.

Wimpole Park is the work of the noted landscape designers of their day, such as Charles Bridgeman, Humphry Repton, Sanderson Miller and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, and contains extensive parkland, avenues of trees, serpentine lakes, woodland belts and a Gothic folly.

We can also visit Wimpole Home Farm, designed by Sir John Soane and built as a model farm on the estate. This was restored in the 1980s and is now a working farm and centre for rare breeds, including Longhorn cattle and Tamworth pigs. There is also a restaurant offering all kinds of refreshments, a picnic area, shop, and plants for sale.

Our coach will leave Clarence Avenue, Gants Hill at 9.00am, stopping at Saffron Walden for coffee and a walk-about on the way, and will leave the Wimpole Estate at 5.00pm. Tickets are £19 (£11 for National Trust members), covering the cost of the coach and entry to the estate, hall, farm and gardens. Please book by 6 May using the enclosed form and including a deposit of £8 per person (non-refundable unless the ticket can be resold). Please make cheques payable to *Valentines Park Conservationists* and post to me at

The  
balance will be collected on the coach on the day.

*Dinah Mullineux*

## Membership renewals

*The VPC committee would like to thank all members who renewed their subscriptions for 2006, and for all the generous donations to our Restoration Fund. Your support for the VPC's work is much appreciated.*

*Margaret Elvin*

## Equipment needed for the AGM

During the interval at this year's AGM we hope to run a slide show featuring some of the many photographs taken of the park by VPC members over the years, including some marvellous shots by professional photographer and member Sally Reed. The idea is that the show will run automatically on a continuous loop, so that people can wander in and out of the room looking at the slides as they please.

However, in order to arrange this, we need either a slide carousel/back-projector unit with a timing facility, or a timer which can be connected to a standard slide projector for showing slides on a normal screen. If anyone has equipment of this kind which they would be happy to loan the VPC for the day, please contact me on (020) 8554 or at

With many thanks in advance to anyone who can help with this.

*Karen Lane*

## Council liaison

Committee members have continued their monthly meetings with council officers and have contributed to the development of the tree strategy, plans for landscaping around the mansion, the redevelopment of the kitchen garden, and the education and access plan, and have raised several concerns about maintenance and repair in the park. Certainly more than enough to justify the tea and biscuits the council provides for our meetings!

The tree strategy has taken up most time and has now gone through three revisions, with the final draft due to be published shortly. Overall, we support the council's plans and believe that they will go a long way towards making up for the past 20 to 30 years of neglect, and put tree management in the park on a sound footing. However, we have some concerns about the lack of attention given to the area around the boating lake, the balance between felling and planting, the absence of any plans for the islands in the boating lake and fish pond, and the need to maintain ecological niches for the park's wildlife. We would also like to see firm proposals for restoring the Wilderness area before anything beyond necessary remedial work is carried out. If you would like to see a copy of our final response to the draft tree strategy, please e-mail me or contact any other committee member. We expect the tree strategy to be completed and accepted by the council within the next couple of months.

We have also discussed the proposals for the area around the mansion, with most attention being paid to car and other vehicle parking and access to the park. We have pushed for the maximum screening

of the proposed parking area and the minimum amount of vehicle access to those parts of the park close to the mansion. We will be returning to this topic again and, hopefully, I'll be able to give an update on the plans for the mansion and surrounding area in the next newsletter.

We are currently working on the education and access plan, which is still at an early stage but which sees a big role for the VPC. Again, if you have any views on this and how much we - as a voluntary group - should be involved and committed to this activity, please let me know. The committee will be putting the VPC's views to the council shortly, so this is a good time to tell us what you'd like to see.

*David Lane*

## Seen in the park

Japanese Aralia (*Fatsia japonica*)

by Margaret Elvin



## Tree walk

Many thanks to Valentines Park Project Manager Gary Meeds and council Tree Officer Peter Marshall for conducting a guided walk in the park on 22 January. This was a part of an event held by Redbridge council at Valentines Mansion, to publicise the forthcoming restoration of the park using the £3 million Heritage Lottery Fund award.

Gary and Peter's walk, to explain the Tree Strategy which forms part of the restoration plan, was interesting and informative, and we came away with a much clearer idea of how certain trees would be removed and others planted in order to improve the park's appearance and suitability for wildlife.

Gary is planning more walks for the spring and early summer, and another mansion event and walk in June - please see our Events Diary for details.

*Karen Lane*

## Park wildlife - sadness and surprise

On 22 January the boating lake's resident female swan was found dead. Since there was no sign of any injury, and no foreign objects were found in her throat, it was supposed that the cause of death was something she'd ingested.

Many wild birds eat a mixed diet of seeds, grains, grasses and weeds. Unfortunately, in recent months several well-meaning people have been feeding the birds on or near the lakes vast quantities of white bread and pasta. While these are filling, they are not nutritious, and eventually the birds suffer from such a diet. Brown bread would be marginally better for them, grain or wild bird mixture more so.

\* \* \*

In late January one of the security guards on duty in Valentines Mansion heard some strange noises after sunset. Assuming children were the cause, he went outside to investigate. Nobody was visible, but a whistling noise seemed to be coming from high up in one of the trees. On shining a torch up to the likely site of the sound, he saw a large blue parrot!

Knowing that these birds like monkey nuts, he put some on the ground, and the parrot was caught when it flew down for them. As it had some slight injuries, the guard took it to Goddards veterinary clinic at Wanstead for treatment. Staff there would try to trace its owner, and failing that, find a good home for it.

*Julie Bradley*

## Gidea Hall - Valentines' vanished cousin

As anyone who has the misfortune to commute into and out of Liverpool Street Station knows, the Essex/London suburbs are home to many bankers and others working in financial services. In one respect, this is just the latest example of a relationship between the City and the area that has existed for 200 years or so. Yet in another respect it is vastly different: the bankers of the 18th and 19th centuries were men of wealth and position, who could afford to buy and build mansions such as Valentines - no suburban semi or terrace for them.

Sadly, most of these houses have long gone but their history can help us understand the lucky survivors such as our own park and mansion. This seems especially true of Gidea Hall, demolished in 1930.

Gidea Hall, which was at one time grand enough to receive Queen Elizabeth I, was rebuilt in the early 18th century, around the same time as the parkland and gardens of Valentines were being transformed by Robert Surman. The work was carried out by Sir John Eyles, sub-governor of the South Sea Com-

pany, where Surnam also worked. The house stood just north of Hare Street, now Main Road, and was home in the early 1800s to Humphry Repton, who worked on several estates in the surrounding area, including Wanstead.

In 1897 Sir John Raphael MP bought the house and its estate. In 1902 he donated land to the west of the house to the council, who purchased additional parts of the estate to create Raphael Park, which still contains traces of a formal long water and a serpentine lake. In 1909 Sir John Raphael set about developing the Romford Garden Suburb out of the remainder of the estate and created much of the district we now know as Gidea Park.

As there are several echoes of Valentines' history here, I plan to carry out more research on Gidea Hall and its parkland, and if there are enough features and facts to make a visit worthwhile, I'll arrange a tour of the park and Garden Suburb later in the year.

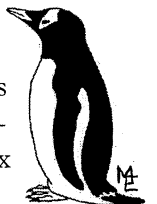
*David Lane*

## An Antarctic Afternoon

On 6 November 2005 we enjoyed another sell-out event at Valentines Mansion when we spent an afternoon learning about the great White Continent of Antarctica. Photographer, lecturer and geographer Roger Slade entertained and educated us with his tales of life on board a Russian expedition ship voyaging around the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula.

Roger's relaxed manner, sense of humour and veneration of the Antarctic was evident as we marvelled at his superb slides showing the wildlife and breathtaking land and seascapes of the area. We saw intensely blue icebergs and glaciers, rotund, dark-eyed seals recumbent on stony shores, rugged white mountains, a hot volcanic pool incongruously steaming in its freezing surroundings, some of the many nationalities on board ship and on land - and countless numbers of penguin. Particularly memorable were the juvenile King Penguins, looking like fluffy brown hot water bottle covers whilst awaiting their sleek, handsome adulthood, and the colourfully crested Rockhopper Penguins, looking like proud punks!

We left the mansion eager for more, and better informed about the climate, topography and fragility of this remote and precious region. We thank Roger for his stimulating talk, Nigel Burch for providing the venue, and Dinah Mullineux and her team for the tasty refreshments.



*Margaret Elvin*

## EVENTS DIARY

### Events organised by Redbridge council

Gary Meeds, Valentines Park Project Manager, will be leading some free guided walks in the park, to explain the council's plans for felling and planting trees as part of the park's restoration using the £3 million Heritage Lottery Fund award. The walks, on **Sundays 2 April** and **7 May**, will start at 2.00pm from Valentines Mansion and last about an hour.

Gary is also planning an exhibition on design proposals for the park in Valentines Mansion, another Tree Walk, and a presentation by a guest speaker from a London borough which has already successfully restored its parks using HLF money, on **Sunday 4 June** from 2.00-5.00pm. Admission free.

### Saturday 25 March

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

### Sunday 9 April

*Annual General Meeting.* Valentines Mansion, 3.00-5.00pm. A short business meeting will be followed by refreshments and a presentation by Gary Meeds, Valentines Park Project Manager, on plans for restoring the park using the HLF award.

### Sunday 23 April

*Spring Migrant Birdwatching.* Peter Hopkins leads a walk to look at some of the migrant and resident species which should be in the park at this time of year. 8.30-10.30am. Meet by the Pavilion café.

### Saturday 29 April

Planting for summer in the Old English Garden, Regency Border and Rose Temple. 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet OEG. Help always welcome.

### Saturday 20 May

*May Fair.* Valentines Mansion, 10.00am-5.00pm. Organised by the Friends of Valentines Mansion. Stalls, displays, live music, children's activities, refreshments. Admission £1, under 12s free.

### Saturday 27 May

Maintenance work in the OEG, Regency Border and Rose Garden. Help always welcome for any amount of time between 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet OEG.

### Saturday 17 June

*Jazz on a Summer's Evening.* Valentines Mansion, 7.30-10.00pm. A welcome return for the popular swing quintet *Who Else For Jazz?* Tickets for the band's previous shows have quickly sold out, so to be sure of a seat please book early, using the enclosed form. Tickets £7.50, concessions £6.00.

The VPC will be preparing the mansion for the show on Friday 16 July. This involves a little light cleaning and tidying, putting out chairs, and dressing the room up for the show. If you can help with this for any amount of time between 10.30am-1.00pm please contact Margaret Elvin on (020) 8554

### Saturday 24 June

Maintenance work in the OEG, Regency Border and Rose Garden. 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet OEG. Help always welcome.

### Saturday 8 July

*Coach outing to the Wimpole Estate.* Near Cambridge. Includes a break for refreshments and a walk-about in Saffron Walden on the way. Coach leaves Clarence Avenue, Gants Hill, at 9.00am sharp, and the Wimpole Estate at 5.00pm. Tickets £19, National Trust members £11.00. Deposit £8.00 (not refundable unless the ticket/s can be resold), with the remainder paid on the coach on the day. Please book by 6 May, using the enclosed form.

#### VPC Chairman

Stephen Smith - (020) 8554

#### Council Liaison/Acting Secretary

David Lane - (020) 8554

#### Treasurer

Gill Stuart - 01992

#### Membership Secretary

Margaret Elvin - (020) 8554

#### Press & Publicity

Julie Bradley - (020) 8554

#### Catering & Events

Dinah Mullineux - (020) 8252

Janet Plimmer - (020) 8554

#### Newsletter Editorial

Karen Lane - (020) 8554