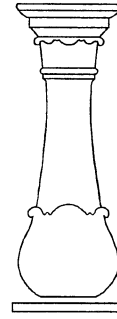


# VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER

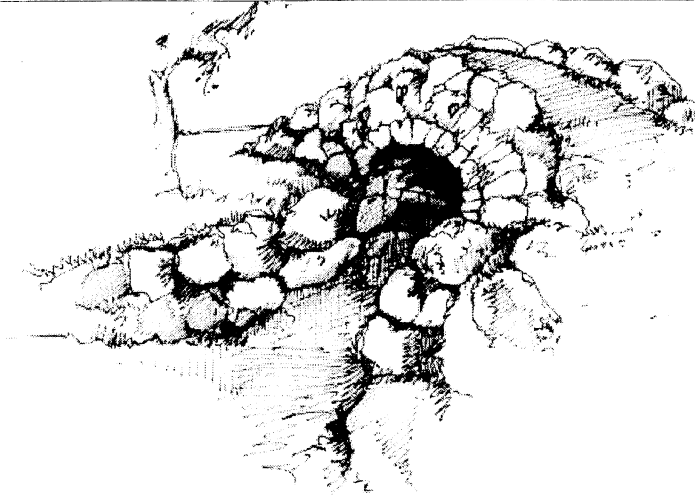
Honorary Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE



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

Issue no. 25 November 2006

## Park restoration update



*How the Fishpond Grotto should look after restoration.  
by Richard Griffiths Architects*

I was appointed by Redbridge council in July 2005, to oversee the Valentines Park restoration project. From day one it was very clear to me why local people love Valentines so much. Remarkably, most of the principal landscape features are still with us and we can all be comforted and excited by the prospect of their comprehensive restoration within the next 12 to 18 months.

The success of the Valentines Mansion Heritage Lottery Fund bid earlier this year was a further boost to our plans as it significantly increased the potential for educational and social activity in the park.

A contractor will be appointed in early December and will start on site in January 2007. Although the area around the mansion and the Wilderness area will be closed to the public during restoration works, we aim to arrange tours of the site every few weeks, the first of which is planned for February 2007.

There will be plenty of information around the park about the works, but please feel free to phone me at any time on the Parks General Enquiry Line - (020) 8708 - if you need any further details.

*Gary Meeds*

*Please see our Events Diary for details of Gary's first guided tour, for VPC members-only, of the restoration areas near the mansion on 10 February 2007.*

## Membership renewals

Enclosed in this newsletter is a form for you to complete so that you may renew your annual VPC membership, which will lapse on 31 December 2006. Please return this to me with your subscription (unchanged at £6, or £3.50 concession), together with any donation you may wish to make to the VPC's Restoration Fund. Recent subscriptions from newer members who joined on or after 1 October this year will cover 2007 as well, so will not need renewing. The VPC committee is very grateful to all members for supporting the role the Conservationists play in restoring the park for the benefit of the community and wildlife, and we hope that you will renew your membership for 2007.

*Margaret Elvin*

## The Men of the Trees

*'Generations to come will stroll beneath trees in Ilford's parks grateful for the shade but oblivious to the fact that some of the town's leading citizens spent the best part of a gloomy, raw December morning in 1937 planting them.'*

This is how the *Ilford Recorder* began its report of the planting of the 'Men of the Trees' avenues and trees in Ilford on 2 December 1937.

The Men of the Trees avenue in Valentines, running from, roughly, the bridge across the Mansion's ha-ha to the southern-most entrance in Emerson Road, was part of a day of tree planting organised by the Ilford branch of the Men of the Trees, to mark the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. It was planned originally for Armistice Day but a drought in October delayed the planting. The event in Valentines was complemented by plantings in Clayhall Park, Goodmayes Park and Seven Kings Park, and Barkingside, Goodmayes and Hainault Recreation Grounds. In total, 311 trees were planted in Ilford's parks in December 1937.

Apparently, the idea of marking the Coronation by tree planting was suggested by a Miss Wynne-Jones,

*(cont.)*

and a plaque by the tree she planted is still in the park. The initial reluctance of the council to support the idea was overcome when the local branch of the Men of the Trees supported her plans. And the results are still there for us to enjoy.

The Valentines planting was a bit special as it was attended by Dr Richard St Barbe Baker, the founder of the Men of the Trees, a group he formed to encourage tree planting for its environmental, social and economic benefits.

In his speech to mark the planting at Valentines, Richard St Barbe Baker commented that 'The idea of associating tree planting with Armistice Day was that if a country was worth fighting for, it was worth keeping beautiful by tree planting'. How sad that the Men of the Trees' hopes, that 'the falling of the leaves would be for the healing of the nations' - recorded on the commemorative plaque in Valentines - came to nothing. The issue of the *Ilford Recorder* that reported the planting also carried an article about the Mayor attending an event to show people how to use gas masks and another about an attack on the house of the local organiser of British Union of Fascists. It's also sad that the commemorative plaques survived in the park for almost 70 years before being stolen earlier this year.

More happily, the Men of the Trees are still planting trees around the world. More information about the organisation and its founder can be found at [www.internationaltreefoundation.org](http://www.internationaltreefoundation.org)

### **The Mayors' Avenue**

Following on from this bit of research, I also tried to find out something about the planting of the Mayors' Avenue. I think this was planted - or at least the plaques were installed - to mark the end of Ilford Council and its replacement by the London Borough of Redbridge in 1964/65. Unfortunately I have found no evidence - at least in the *Ilford Recorder* - to support this idea. If any of our members have some information about the Mayors' Avenue, please get in touch. It would be good to know a bit more about this part of the park's more recent history.

*David Lane*

*The VPC enjoyed another successful coach trip in July, when we visited Saffron Walden and the Wimpole Estate, near Cambridge. The weather was perfect - dry and sunny but not too hot - and there was plenty to see and do at both places. We could easily have spent longer at each, particularly the Wimpole Estate, where the working rare breeds farm was especially popular. Many thanks to Dinah Mullineux who, with Janet Plimmer's help, arranged a very pleasant and interesting day out.*

### **Valentines Miniature Railway**

VPC member David Keating sent the following e-mail in response to Roger Backhouse's information, given in the last newsletter, on the children's passenger railway which ran in the park in the 1940s:

*I was born in Wellesley Road in 1940 and some of my early childhood was spent in Valentines Park with my mother. I can just remember the miniature railway. It was located alongside the path which runs from the Pavilion café area to the sites of the model yacht pond and open air swimming pool, on the Melbourne Road side of the path, on grass. The track was narrow gauge and not very long, stopping before the yacht pond at one end and the boating lake at the other. As I recall, the engine was steam driven with a tender for coal. I see that Roger Backhouse has discovered that it was there in 1943 and I feel sure it was there at least until 1945/46. I have no idea who ran it.*

Thanks to the information supplied by David and others, we now have a better idea of when, where and how this railway operated.

It ran for a few summers in the park, perhaps firstly in 1943 as part of the government's 'Holidays and Home' wartime programme of children's activities, and probably for between three and six years after that. The carriages were pulled by a small coal-fired steam engine, and the attraction may have been run by the Ilford and West Essex Model Railway Club.

The track was portable, and probably between seven and 11 inches wide and a hundred or so yards long. Its small size meant it could have been laid on almost any flat stretch of grass, though a couple of VPC members remember it running on one side or other of the Cranbrook, the boating/stickleback stream with stepped concrete sides which flows above ground from near the lower Brisbane Road gates to the end of the boating lake near the Pavilion café.

The track was probably taken away at the end of each summer except perhaps for its last one, as member Peter Butt has said that a friend of his, who moved to Ilford in 1954, remembers seeing the abandoned track in the grass around that time.

However, it almost certainly disappeared permanently at some point - it is highly unlikely that it lies buried under the grass by the stream or elsewhere in the park. According to Roger Backhouse, all that may remain are remnants of the cinder base on which the track was laid - a faint reminder of one of Valentines' most fleeting features.

With thanks to Peter Butt, David Robinson, Roger Backhouse and David Keating for contributing to this topic.

*Karen Lane*

## Good news for Barking Park

Although lacking Valentines' historical value, Barking Park is still a fine park. Neglected for many years, it is good news that it has been pledged almost £3.5 million by the Heritage Lottery Fund for its restoration. Funding covers training the park's Friends group, and the restoration of historic features and the Lido area. Well done, Barking!

*David Lane*

*We are grateful to member Roger Backhouse for giving the VPC permanent loan of a carousel slide projector. This has already been borrowed by the Friends of Valentines Mansion for an event at the mansion, and by another group for an event elsewhere in the borough, and the VPC will undoubtedly use it soon. So many thanks to Roger for the donation.*

## Visit to Barrier Park

A cluster of VPC members met at Gants Hill station on Saturday 12 August for a journey to Pontoon Dock on the Docklands Light Railway, to visit London's newest public park, by the Thames Barrier.

After a relaxing stop at the park café, which had glass walls on three sides, overlooking modern planting and landscaping, we walked towards the River Thames, taking in the main features of the park, which were laid out on higher and lower levels.

To one side were formal stands of young trees, grouped beside straight grass or gravel walkways bordered by sloping or arched hedges and layered blocks of plants. These slowly revealed a children's playground, a football field, a wild flower meadow, and a peaceful area by the riverbank, with a war memorial and a panoramic view of the Thames Barrier and river. A white block of luxury apartments, looking like an ocean liner, overlooked an ancient jetty, at the end of which a few seabirds sat patiently.

We returned to the lower level of the park, where wave-shaped hedges and flowering plants were arranged in a linear design, with narrow paved paths between them, so that as we walked along, different coloured flowers were glimpsed over the dips in the hedges. The steep banks of this lower level were covered in green climbers, and it ended in a walk-through water feature, where fountains made constantly changing height patterns, to the delight of young and old alike.

After another café-stop it was time to catch the train home, after a most enjoyable trip. By coincidence, the following Friday Barrier Park featured in a *Gardeners' World* TV programme on public parks, with a glowing account from presenter and park enthusiast Joe Swift.

*Hazel Dongworth*

## Nature Conservation Team events

**Sunday 19 November** - *Winter Warmer Tree Walk*. Claybury Woods. Meet at the Claybury Park gate, Ravensbourne Gardens, near Wedmore Avenue, Clayhall, 10.30am.

**Sunday 3 December** - *Bird Walk*. Fairlop Waters Country Park. Meet angling lake car park, Sailing Centre entrance, Forest Road, Hainault, 9.00am.

**Monday 4 December** - *Roding Valley Forum*. Issues and concerns about Roding Valley Park. Scout Hut, Roding Lane South, Woodford, 7.30pm.

### Redbridge Nature Conservation Volunteers

Meet every Wednesday, 10.00am-3.00pm at several sites across the borough. Please call Francis Castro on (020) 8501 for further details.

### Contact details for all events

- Nature Conservation Team: (020) 8501
- [emily.reynolds@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:emily.reynolds@redbridge.gov.uk)
- Emily Reynolds, Nature Conservation Team Leader, Hainault Forest Country Park, Romford Road, Chigwell, Essex IG7 4QN



### Seen in the park ...

Grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

*By Margaret Elvin*

## EVENTS DIARY

### Sunday 19 November

*A Return to the Antarctic.* Valentines Mansion, 3.00-5.00pm. Following his successful presentation at the mansion last year, photographer, lecturer and geographer Roger Slade returns to give another illustrated talk on his visits to Antarctica. For tickets (£3.50, concessions £2.50) please contact Margaret Elvin on (020) 8554

On *Friday 17 November*, the VPC will be preparing the mansion for Roger's talk. This involves some light cleaning and tidying, putting out chairs, and dressing the room up a little. If you would like to help for any amount of time between 10.30am-1.00pm please contact Margaret Elvin as above.

### Saturday 25 November

Preparing the beds for winter: Old English Garden Regency Border and Rose Garden. Helpers always welcome for any amount of time between 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet Old English Garden.

### Sunday 26 November

*Winter migrant birdwatching with Peter Hopkins.* 8.30-10.30am. Meet by the Pavilion café. Peter hopes his walk will include a sighting of 'Valentino', the Mediterranean Gull, who should have returned for his seventh winter in the park. Peter has discovered that Valentino spends the summer in Antwerp and the whole of the winter in Valentines, apparently never having flown to any other part of the UK: one of the many avian visitors who should be in the park at this time of year.

### Tuesday 28 & Wednesday 29 November

*Valentines archives.* Organised by the Friends of Valentines Mansion and Ian Dowling, LB Redbridge Local Studies Librarian. Local Studies Room, Central Library, Ilford. Various maps, pictures and documents relating to Valentines Mansion will be available for FOVM and VPC members to see at any time between 9.30am-8.00pm on both days. For further information phone (020) 8708

### Friday 8 December

*Music, Magic and Mince Pies.* An evening's entertainment organised by the Friends of Valentines Mansion. Valentines Mansion, 7.30pm. For tickets, priced £7.50, please contact Cherry Hooker on (020) 8554

### Saturday 10 February 2007

*Valentines - Projects, Plans and Proposals.* A VPC members-only event. Gary Meeds, Valentines Park Project Manager, will lead a guided tour of the historic core of the park, during which he will discuss the plans for its restoration using the £3 million Heritage Lottery Fund award, and show and explain the work that is already underway. Meet under the porte-cochere, Valentines Mansion, at 10.00am. The tour should last about 45 minutes, and refreshments will be available in the mansion afterwards.

### Saturday 24 February & Saturday 31 March

Preparing the beds for spring: Old English Garden, Regency Border and Rose Garden. Help always welcome between 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet OEG.

### Sunday 22 April

*VPC Annual General Meeting.* Valentines Mansion, 3.00-5.00pm. A short meeting will be followed by refreshments and a presentation by a guest speaker. Further details in our March 2007 newsletter.

### Saturday 28 April

*Coffee Morning.* Organised by the Friends of Valentines Mansion. Valentines Mansion, 10.30am-1.00pm. The Friends will be serving refreshments, the FOVM and VPC stalls will be offering merchandise and information, and VPC members will welcome visitors and enquiries as they work on the Regency Border and Old English and Rose gardens near the mansion. Admission free.

#### VPC Chairman

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#### Treasurer

Gill Stuart - 01992

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