

VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER



Hon Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE

Issue No. 4

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Dear Members & Supporters

Firstly, thank you very much for all the interest and support shown at our Valentines Park Centenary Celebration on the 9th of September. Of course, we warmly welcome all those who signed up for VPC membership at the centenary evening and in the past months since our last newsletter.

The most significant development in the past period has been the Redbridge Council's decision to support the formation of a charitable trust for Valentines Mansion. Let us all hope that this will lead to a positive conclusion to the Valentines Mansion saga. As usual, we have had an interesting and fulfilling Summer of activities and we will be happy to see you at any of our forthcoming events in this millennium or the next !

Ujitha de Zoysa

Valentines Park Conservationists Committee

Stephen Smith	Chair
Christine Fairfax	Secretary
Paul Coleman	Treasurer
Rita Coleman	Press Officer
James Edgoose	Membership Secretary
Ujitha de Zoysa	Newsletter Editor

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Victoria Park Visit

On 31st of July, a small group of conservationists visited Victoria Park in Hackney, East London. Doreen Kendall who is a very knowledgeable local historian conducted our tour, taking us through the park and through the ages, from its conception in the 19th century to the present day.

A good number of the park's historic features remain and have been renovated over recent years. The original fountain in the lake was rediscovered recently and restored to its former glory. Unfortunately, not all features have been so lucky, the island pagoda for example, was bombed in World War II and had to be demolished.

The changes in the use of the park down the ages were also very interesting. In the early years, for example, with water not easily accessible to the borough's poor, some of the pools provided an essential service of acting as bathing pools – now there are recreational paddling pools. The popularity of the bandstand has largely given way to weekend festivals, which are a valuable source of income. However, after some initial problems, the Council now insists on the organisers clearing the site of rubbish and the number of events held annually is limited to allow the parkland to recover from the increased volume of visitors.

One of the most interesting aspects of the park was the superb standard of upkeep of grounds and planting. Although the work is contracted out, there appears to be a good cohesive plan, which allows, for instance, the maintenance of a large number of splendid hanging baskets, even though watering is a very time consuming task. It was evident that due to several initiatives and general vigilance, vandalism is not a significant problem.

All in all it was a very enjoyable visit. It appears that Doreen's passion for the park is shared by the local public and the Council, who obviously believe the park is an asset worthy of investing the necessary time & money.

Gill Faul

Future of Valentines Mansion

Following Redbridge Council's historic decision to support the establishment of a charitable trust; to administer the future restoration of this 17th century grade II* listed building, they have also agreed to provide £300,000 for restoration work to the exterior of the building during this financial year.

At present a charitable trust document (based on that for Copped Hall, Epping) is being drafted by solicitors acting for Cranbrook Residents Association (CRA) and Redbridge Council. Although CRA have campaigned for three years to win a suitable community use for the Mansion, it is now important that the future charity's trustees are drawn from and represent a wider range of interests within our borough's community. One of the trustees proposed at present is a member of our own (VPC) committee. We feel this proposal is appropriate, as it reflects the close link between the interests of the Mansion and the Park. After the legalities have been completed and the charity registered, the trustees will undertake fund raising. At the end of a transitional period of about a year, as funds become available, it is hoped that a phased restoration will enable areas of the Mansion to be opened to the public in stages. A paid manager and caretaker will be appointed to oversee the day to day management.

Quite a few ideas have been put forward for the future use of the Mansion. These include various sorts of education. I hope that some educational facilities will link with the surrounding park landscape and wildlife.

Christine Fairfax

The Centenary Celebration

On the evening of 9th of September, about seventy five members & friends raised a glass to the toast proposed by our Honorary Vice President, Mike Gapes MP to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the opening of Valentines Park and to the future of our newly fledged organisation. The event held at the Gloucester Room in the Central Library was very well supported; we were only just short of standing room only.

Stephen Smith gave the first session talk on the opening of the park in 1899 and our (VPC) work to date.

continued in next column

The Centenary Celebration – continued from previous column

Examination of press records from the turn of the last century revealed rivalries between Ilford and Barking which could almost feature in the Recorder newspaper today. Stephen's main theme was our role in raising standards for the current horticultural regime in the park, with a practical input as well as well researched technical support. He noted the current position, where, with the absence of a Head Gardener to focus care of the park, present policy lacked creativity. This was compared to the way in which Victoria Park in Hackney has been turned around, with a combination of local community commitment and lottery funding.

Our second session talk from our guest speaker was by Dr. Laura Williams of the Redbridge Museum Service. Laura took the opportunity to promote the Museum Services' local involvement projects and then tackled her subject – The 18th Century Landscape, with contagious enthusiasm. Her depth of knowledge was succinctly communicated and her insights as far as Valentines was concerned were most enlightening. She linked the growth of estates like Valentines to success in the nearby City of London, whose transient wealth could be given more substance with a well placed mansion and park. The close presence of prestigious Wanstead House gave local estates an instant kudos. Laura also pointed out that well ordered gardens displayed the owner's aesthetic tastes and control of nature. She stressed that water features such as the canal, demonstrated wealth, where access to a clean water supply on the edge of the city was otherwise problematic. So much of the park we know today has its roots in marking out the social status of its former owners. Laura felt that the "Ha Ha" was the most interesting feature of the park landscape, as it linked the formal gardens with the wider rural landscape to exaggerate the apparent land owned, and thereby suggest great land owning. Laura's aside that some landowners bred small sheep and cattle to make the adjacent parkland seem even more extensive, showed that genetic engineering has been with us for generations and all in the cause of keeping up with the Jones'.

We were all most appreciative of such a well presented talk from Dr. Laura Williams. Finally, we thank all those who contributed to the cost of refreshments, which raised £80 and covered most of the cost of the evening.

Paul Coleman

Our Autumn/Winter Programme

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Place</u>
Pruning roses & shrubs and general tidying *	30 th October 27 th November	10:30 -12:30 (approx) " "	Old English Garden & Rose Garden
Guided bird walks	23 October 24 th December	10:30 -12:30 (approx) " "	Aviary near Old English Garden
Place nestboxes for birds **	8 th January	10:30 - 12:30 (approx)	Wilderness Area (across long canal from Rose Gdn)
Annual General Meeting	8 th February	19:45 – 22:00	St. Margaret's Church Hall (Balfour Rd/Perth Rd)

* We have been given permission to start removing dead wood from some of the old climbing/rambling roses, under expert guidance. Anyone who does not fancy tackling this thorny task will have the option of joining others tidying up the shrubs in the Old English Garden.

** Few people have offered to assemble/make some nestboxes. We expect to have a fun time fixing them in suitable places. Do come and join the onlookers and help hold the ladders ! Any children present can write their name on a box and look at it later in Spring.

Please note that regular volunteer workers can now wear an 'official' badge – courtesy of Redbridge Council.

Land Use Consultants Report

Council's Leisure Services managers now have the report of the detailed survey of Valentines Park. We understand that they are currently considering the figures that should be included in the Heritage Lottery Fund application for post-restoration maintenance costs. We have recommended that the cost of a permanent Manager/Head Gardener with good horticultural expertise be included in these longer-term plans, otherwise we envisage that the benefit of capital expenditure for restoration would be eroded in time. Our hope is that such a person would plan and co-ordinate professional gardeners with volunteers from community groups such as our own.

Christine Fairfax

Letters:

I have been on some of your walks. They were really interesting. But I would like to make it more fun for other children.

How about a Teddy Bear's Picnic or a Treasure Hunt or a games afternoon ?

Luke Cogdell (aged 7 1/2)
Collinwood Gardens, Ilford

Any volunteers to organise & run such an event ?

Colin Newman of Church Road, Barking wrote a letter expressing his appreciation of our newsletter.

Thoughts of Chairman Smith

Thanks for your marvellous support and I hope you enjoyed the Centenary Celebration evening as much as I did. Having met with so many enthusiastic members and supporters, it seems a good time to begin to examine the role of Valentines Park Conservationists in the longer term and follow up some suggestions you have made to us.

When Rita Coleman and I were organising the symposium last year, one of our aims was to bring together a "pool of expertise for the local community to draw on". The formation of the conservationists has proved an important forum where experts and locals can come together, we have seen this on our various walks & talks.

Another of our aims has been to offer the park authorities practical help and our 'adoption' of the Old English Garden & Rose Garden has given us a focus for this. What we have aimed to do this year is to help prevent further deterioration of these valuable gardens by offering to carry out work beyond the scope of the current horticultural contract. In the long term, though, we hope the necessary tasks will be written in to the contract. Other practical sessions have included bulb planting and tidying. The practical sessions this year have provided a small group of us with the opportunity of expressing our commitment to the park. We do, however, appreciate that this does not appeal to all our members, though your interest and membership of the Valentines Park Conservationists is just as important.

We also aim to apply for a reappraisal of the park's current grade II listing (in contrast to the Mansion's grade II*). English Heritage (EH) has undertaken a nationwide re-assessment of their gradings. An inspector has already visited the park but has yet to make a recommendation. Should we be successful in having our park upgraded, it should help it to qualify for grants and also enhance its chance of winning Heritage Lottery Funding.

Stephen Smith