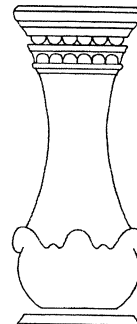


# VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER

Honorary Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE



Issue no.7 September 2000

## Greetings from your new editor!

And straight down to business: Items for inclusion in the VPC Newsletter can now be sent straight to me, either on paper (preferably typed or WP'd, though this isn't essential), or on disk, or via e-mail. Addresses:

All kinds of contributions are welcome: Letters, reports, ideas and suggestions, reminiscences, dates for the diary, thanks and reminders .... Anything and everything to do with the park, really. Only the basic editorial rules apply: Short items are preferable, and contributions may be edited for reasons of space.

The next edition of the Newsletter is due out in February, so please send all copy for this issue to me by Friday 12 January 2001. I look forward to hearing from you!

*Karen Lane*

## CONTACTS

### **Chairman**

Stephen Smith - 8554

### **Secretary**

Christine Fairfax - 8551

### **Treasurer**

Gill Faul - 8598

### **Membership Secretary**

Margaret Elvin - 8554

### **Press Officer**

Rita Coleman - 8554

### **Newsletter Editorial**

Karen Lane - 8554

## Strawberries and Mulberries

We met on Saturday 17 June 2000 for our Rose Appreciation Strawberry Picnic, under the delightful shade of an old black mulberry tree (*Morus nigra*) near Valentines Mansion. Although grown in Britain since 1550, this was a much younger tree, probably a post-James I, 17th-18th century planting.

Chairman Stephen Smith led two separate groups on a tour of the Rosary and Old English Garden near the Mansion. He gave a short historical background to the provision of these valuable gardens by former owners, and showed us the work done by the ad-hoc working parties during the spring. This was evident in the colourful blooms, and the scent of the climbing roses and the older multiflora type, notably those in the Haha, a most interesting feature of the park. We saw the restoration work undertaken on the central arbour, and the plantings in the central beds of the Old English Garden, which is so much nicer now, following the care and attention given to it.

We returned to an abundance of delicious strawberries, freshly gathered from an Essex farm, with cream and cool drinks arranged by Christine Fairfax, Rita Coleman and other kind helpers. It was nice to see families with children, and so many fresh faces amongst those more familiar to us. Under shade and straw hats, conversations flowed, and views, reminiscences, even humour, were exchanged whilst consuming fruit and drinks. All shared in a friendly way the delights of these surroundings during a lovely summer afternoon.

*Richard Beckford*

## Plant Fund

The cost of purchasing the roses and clematis now in the ironwork frame in the Old English Garden was covered by an initial donation to our new Plant Fund. We decided that such a fund would enable us to work outside the restrictions of the council's budgets, and that some members who are unable to help with practical work in the park may like to contribute by supporting the Fund.

We will use any money received to purchase long-term stock for our planting schemes. Donations will initially help us to restore some permanent colour and interest, but there will be an added value too: The council's Leisure Services managers are currently completing the Business Plan for their Heritage Lottery Fund application for the cost of restoring the park's landscape. Any contribution we make, whether financial or in work which can be cost-valued, is reported to Leisure Services and helps towards the 25% of the budget which must be raised locally as match funding. Work on the park will be phased over four years, with a likely cost of £3.25 million, so the local share is considerable.

We have the opportunity to show through our Plant Fund that financial investment, plus cost-valued local talent and expertise, will enhance the quality of the park's gardens, and demonstrate a local appreciation of Valentines Park to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Any donations to 'Valentines Park Conservationists - Plant Fund' should be sent to *Gill Faul*,

*Christine Fairfax*

## July Tree Walk

*Trees form an important cultural focus in societies all over the world, and on 30 July we celebrated some of Ilford's best specimens in a tour of the park. The longevity of trees makes them as important to our cultural heritage as the buildings or monuments left by our predecessors, and the aim of the walk was to look at the use of trees in the designed landscape of our park.*

*We began our tour with the mulberries, which looked beautiful, and were planted here as much for their fruit as the picturesque effect they have on the lawn. We moved quickly on (as quickly as about 50 people can move) to see one of the highlights of Valentines, the cedar in the American Gardens. Herbert Lockwood reminded us that it was considered one of the largest in England when this part of the park came into public ownership in 1907.*

*Our next stop was the ancient field maple on the boundary with the golf course. This hedgerow tree probably pre-dates the Mansion and must be one of the oldest in the park. The trees in the Glade were next on our list, many of them dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. Though some of them are becoming difficult to view, the pines and the planes make some fine groups of specimens.*

*Our last port of call was the century-old avenue of horse chestnuts near Melbourne gate. Amongst these are two much older pollarded oaks, giving us a layer of history dating from the time Ilford was under forest law.*

*The afternoon seemed such a success that we've planned another walk on 15 October to look at autumn colour.*

*Stephen Smith*

## The Old English Garden

We hope members have noticed improvements in the centre of this garden near the Mansion. The burnt-out, vandalised and rusting wrought iron frame has now been restored, and we are grateful to Colin Willingale, who gave up several weekends to undertake this work, and to the council's Leisure Services managers who agreed to cover the costs. Many of us had a chance to thank Colin on 17 June at our 'Roses and Strawberries' picnic, by which time we had planted suitable roses and clematis within the frame.

After much consideration and advice from rose expert Margaret Stewart, we planted four *Alister*

*Stella Gray* noisette roses (1894). We hope that in time they will provide a striking focal point to this garden as they are fragrant and should reach 15 feet and bloom repeatedly throughout the summer. The yolky buds fade to creamy-white, well shaped flowers which should contrast with the clematis *Etoile Violette* and *Margot Koster*.

We also planted as bedding *Nicotianas* and *Erigeron Speciosus* in nicely toning colours. We noticed that one side of the ironwork frame had received the attention of climbers so we planted a few *Morning Glory* runner beans to provide some protection, but unfortunately, the beans' scarlet flowers are ruining our colour scheme! However, with good progress from the roses we may not need any 'extras' next year. Meanwhile, you might like a few beans for your supper: the first two were picked on 12 August!

*Christine Fairfax*

#### www.valentines ...

Dot-coms may come and (as we've seen) dot-coms may go, but the internet and the world wide web are here to stay – and Valentines Park Conservationists will soon be part of this! We've started work on our own website and hope to launch it at the beginning of October.

The site will contain information about the Conservationists – what we are doing and why – and about the park and its history, ecology and future.

Once we've established the website, we'll be looking at ways of using it to support our activities. Ideas that have been mentioned so far include building an oral-history archive, virtual tours of the Park, and online competitions and exhibitions.

If you have any ideas about how we can make the best use of our website, or would like to be involved in this project, please e-mail us at [valentinesparkconservationists@hotmail.com](mailto:valentinesparkconservationists@hotmail.com)

*David Lane*

#### Work Parties

We are grateful to those members who support our practical work sessions, by spreading manure, pruning, digging, weeding or tidying. Other members may wish to be aware of the arrangements.

We only work in the Rose and Old English gardens near the Mansion, on tasks which have been arranged with the council's Leisure Services. We bring our own light tools and gloves, and usually have a few to share. The park keepers kindly loan us wheelbarrows, etc., and we have access to a water point.

Most sessions are from about 10.30am to 12.30pm, or as convenient, and we usually bring flasks, etc. for a short refreshment break. The gardens are a lovely setting in which to work, listening to the songbirds and the geese calling and disputing on the Long Water.

From 26 August we plan to strip two weed-ridden herbaceous beds and replant them in late autumn with fresh stock. Volunteers may help here, or prefer the ongoing work in the Rose Garden, doing dead-heading or pruning and training the ramblers and climbers.

In addition to the main Saturday events, we have scheduled some 'come and go as you please' or 'flexible' dates, which may be more convenient for some members. At least one member of the VPC committee will be present to advise about the ongoing tasks on the following days:

Wednesday 13 September  
 Friday 22 September  
 Wednesday 4 October  
 Friday 13 October  
 Sunday 22 October  
 Wednesday 8 November  
 Friday 17 November  
 Sunday 3 December

Please ring me on (020) 8551 if you need to know about tasks, times and tools beforehand.

*Christine Fairfax*

## EVENTS DIARY

### Special meeting: the future of the Model Yacht Pond

Following the success of the park's Centenary Celebration last September, we are planning to hold another evening event this October.

When we formed our group we knew we wanted to create a forum for discussing future developments at Valentines Park. One area which is clearly in need of development is the old model yacht pond. Before the 1920s this was a cattle pond, and one of the ideas now floating around (excuse the pun) is to recreate a shallow dragonfly pond which can be used by local schools as an environmental studies resource.

The design, layout and funding for the scheme would need to be placed in the hands of experts, and with this in mind we plan to hold a meeting with a guest speaker who will give us an idea of the feasibility of such a project. This will also provide a chance for our members and other interested parties to express their views.

The date and venue for this event are not yet set, so we'll be sending out invitations nearer the time, for what should be a stimulating evening for all those interested in the future of the park.

*Stephen Smith*

### And Somewhere to Go ...

*Laura Williams of Redbridge Museum Service has invited members of our group to see the exhibition All Dressed Up which is running at Ilford Central Library until 30 September. Please ring Central Library (8478 9423) for details of opening times.*

*Stephen Smith*

### Garden History Course

Our Chairman Stephen Smith is teaching an evening course run by the Ilford WEA from 28 September 2000. Entitled *London Parks and Gardens*, students will learn how and why they developed.

Along with some other members, I attended a six week course on the same theme run by Wanstead WEA in the early summer. This provided an overview of the development of garden design, botany and horticulture over several centuries, and at the end of the course we visited Valentines Park to see the landscape in the light of all we had learnt.

We are now keen to find out more, and a 20 week, two term course will enable Stephen to go into more detail. The course (ref no. IL00 104-40) is held at the Redbridge Adult Education Institute, Gaysham Avenue, Gants Hill. Contact Mrs Phillips (8590 2322) or Mrs Levison (8554 0015) to enrol or for more details. Full fees are £69, concessions £55, but students can attend the first class before enrolling for the whole course.

*Christine Fairfax*

### Sunday 30 September

Work on the herbaceous beds in the Old English Garden. Meet 10.30am, OEG.

### Sunday 15 October

Autumn Colour Tree Walk, 2.30-4.00pm. Meet 2.30 by the Aviary.

### Saturday 28 October

Bulb planting. Meet 10.30am, Old English Garden.

### Saturday 25 November

Work on the bird boxes, and pruning. Meet 10.30am, OEG.

### Saturday 30 December

Valentines Mystery Trail. Meet 1.15-1.30pm at the pavilion (the café). Phone David Lane (8554 ) for more details.

### Saturday 27 January 2001

Rose training. Meet 10.30am, Rose Garden.