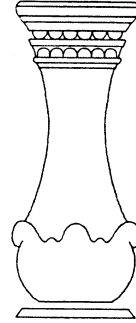


VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER



Honorary Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE

Issue no. 8 February 2001

WWW'e're on the web!

After a lot of hard work, technical irritations and IT mishaps, our website finally went live in January. The site contains details of what we do, our diary, our most recent newsletters and information on the park's history and development.

The site will be enhanced over the coming months with downloadable copies of some of our walks and tours and more items on the park's history. If you are interested in contributing to this project, please contact me on 020 8554 _____ or david.lane@_____

The site can be accessed at:
<http://www.valentinespark.org.uk> or www.valentinesparkconservationists.org.uk

Comments on the site and its usability and usefulness will be welcome.

David Lane

CONTACTS

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Membership renewals

VPC's committee has decided to move membership renewal to the single date of 1 January each year. Therefore, you will find enclosed with this newsletter a letter and 2001 renewal form for completion and return by 28 February. Those members who joined late last year (from 1 October 2000) will have their 2001 membership fees waived, and I trust these people have been correctly identified and not received the letter and form. However, if you think you've been invited to renew your membership in error, please let me know - my telephone number is in the Contacts list.

Margaret Elvin

Claybury woods under threat

Everyone who walks or drives in the area will have seen the imposing water tower of the old Claybury hospital and noticed the screen of trees which encircle it. Surrounded by a high fence for years, the 70 acres of woodland may be a mystery. But not for much longer: The parkland and wood are to be opened to the public as part of the agreement between Crest Homes, who are developing the site, and Redbridge council.

Certain trees and plants indicate that the wood has a history going back to at least 1600, and therefore it is designated an ancient woodland. The western end is associated with coppice management, and is a unique and important combination of 'oak, hornbeam and bluebells' unknown in the rest of Europe, according to the International Classification of Vegetation. Under an agreement with the previous owners, the London Wildlife Trust have managed the woodland as a nature reserve since 1987.

(cont. p.2)

(Claybury woods under threat, cont. from p.1)

A single-storey day ward in the most diverse part of the wood has been demolished, and Crest have applied to build a high-rise apartment block there, on the assumption that they can rebuild on the same site. However, last spring the government published a policy paper which noted that should a previously developed piece of land be situated in a nature conservation area, it cannot then be regarded as suitable for rebuilding upon. Let's trust that pressure from local campaigners makes this a reality.

Doreen Hewitt

Barkingside, Clayhall & Fullwell Agenda 21

The mulberry trees

Our Autumn Colour walk was a huge success, with over 60 people turning out to look at the many unusual and aged tree specimens we have at Valentines.

The storm about a fortnight later was fierce enough to cause considerable damage to some of our more vulnerable trees, and two days later, I took a hesitant walk around the park to see if there were any casualties. Near the mansion I was sad, but not surprised, to see that about half the large pink horse chestnut had come down, but to my relief the mulberries, where we had begun our walk, had come through intact.

Some days later I was disturbed to learn that one of the mulberries had been cut to ground level by council contractors. It seems likely that the wind and saturated soil conditions had combined to weaken the tree's anchorage and as a result the tree, which had stood for perhaps two centuries, sank to the ground.

Such an event is not particularly unusual with mulberries, as they are renowned for being top-heavy: something usually compensated for by judicious pruning. This begs the question as to whether a proper assessment was made before the tree was cut down. Could more have been done to preserve it? In addition, was any of the fallen tree propagated? There was plenty of material with which to do so.

The fact is that Valentines has lost one of its oldest inhabitants, and at the rate at which these trees are disappearing, it's doubtful that we shall be stopping at the mulberries on our tree walks in a couple of years' time.

Stephen Smith

Wise after the event

VPC events always attract large numbers of members and supporters. It's not uncommon to have 50 - 70 people attending our walks and guided tours of the park and even on one of the coldest days of December, 30 brave souls turned out for our end-of-year Mystery Trail.

So it was disappointing that only 20 people attended our Community Forum on *Wildlife in Urban Parks* in October last year. What made matters worse was that two of the attendees were Brian Sangha (head of the council's Leisure Services and a VPC member) and Councillor Bob Littlewood (the council cabinet member with responsibility for Parks and Leisure). And, just to add to our embarrassment, our principal speaker was trapped in a traffic jam outside Reading and was unable to get to the Kenneth More Theatre for the meeting!

This upset resulted in a review by the VPC committee of how we advertise our events and activities. Obviously, there's nothing we can do about 'acts of God' such as traffic jams, but we can improve our publicity and marketing. In the future, we will:

- provide more information to members about our programme of events
- work with other organisations to secure a wider awareness of what we do
- place posters in libraries and other public buildings
- try to get better coverage in local papers

We'll be monitoring how successful these improvements are, so if you would like to help with any of these initiatives, please contact any committee member. Also, please let us know if you have any ideas for events - you can send us your thoughts with your membership renewal. And please, please come along to the meetings!

David Lane

Ilford, Essex

7 January 2001

Dear members,

Having finished my dissertation on Valentines Park, I would like to thank everyone who helped towards it. The pictures, snippets of information and encouragement I received helped greatly, both in getting started and with completing it.

*With very many thanks,
Yours sincerely,*



PS: Congratulations to chairman Stephen Smith on completing his dissertation *A Thesis Study of Valentines Park*, thus gaining the Diploma in the Conservation of Historic Parks and Gardens awarded by the Architectural Association. I know what a hard slog it was to work on at times, so well done Stephen, for not only finishing your thesis, but producing such a thorough and good-looking piece of work, copies of which have been lodged with various Redbridge departments, and the Local Studies section at Ilford Central Library - *Ed.*

Christine Fairfax adds: This thesis, on the history and conservation of Valentines Park, contains much to interest anyone who is familiar with the park and curious to know when and how various features were created. A particularly fascinating section concerns the gardener William Earley, who designed the Rose Garden for Sarah Ingleby in the 1870s. You can read the thesis in the Local Studies archive at Central library: its availability can be checked by contacting Ian Dowling on 020 8478 9421.

Heritage Lottery Fund application

As members will be aware, in November 1999 Land Use Consultants (LUC) completed their

Historic Survey and Restoration Management Plan for the park. Throughout 2000 Leisure Services managers advised us of problems in completing the remaining preparations, and several dates were not met. Last summer, LUC were commissioned to prepare a Business Plan, which was completed in November. Meanwhile, the team of council officers working on the project was enlarged to include Nigel Burch and Conservation Officer Jim Hetherington.

On 8 January 2001 we made enquiries about the progress of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) application at the Area Seven Committee meeting for Cranbrook, Newbury and Valentines wards, and received the following up-to-date briefing on the matter:

Recently Nigel Burch arranged for shrubs to be cut back so that walls and grottoes can be surveyed to obtain accurate costings, and possible additional sources of external funding are being investigated. It is now expected that the work will be finished by the end of February 2001. The borough's budget decisions will be made in March, and we hope that councillors will unite in supporting the park's restoration by providing financial allocations.

Meanwhile, we have been considering various projects for which we might apply for funding from Area Seven's allocation for improvements to local facilities. If included as part of the park's overall restoration scheme, this would attract HLF match funding, and reduce pressure on the borough's main capital/revenue budgets. We are also able to contribute through volunteer work in the park and donations to our Plant Fund, as all such efforts can attract match funding.

The park's contractors have been changed again. English Landscapes took over the maintenance contract from 1 January 2001, for a period of three years.

We do have reservations about the borough's current plans for staffing requirements for the supervision and implementation of the Restoration Management Plan, and we will continue to address our concerns to the relevant managers. We hope to have some positive news for our AGM on 18 March.

Christine Fairfax

EVENTS DIARY

Celebrate at Valentines

Valentines Park Conservationists now share a lot of members in common with the Friends of Valentines Mansion, and we have long hoped to see events in the park linked with ones at the mansion. This begins on Saturday and Sunday 10 & 11 February with *Open House at the Mansion*. Visitors will enjoy live period music as they tour the premises, and then have the opportunity to join a 35-minute guided tour of the park's 18th century landscaped area. Please see the listings below for further details.

On Saturday 12 May the Friends of Valentines Mansion and Redbridge Arts Council are holding a *May Fair*. VPC again hopes to organise events in the park to link with various activities for all ages taking place in and around the mansion. Look out for publicity in the local press, and please invite family and friends along.

Birdwatching events

We are pleased that Peter Hopkins has agreed to lead two more walks for us. On Sunday 18 February we hope to enjoy a spectacular display of winter migrant gulls and waterfowl on the old boating lake. Peter will help us identify the birds, and we may also be lucky enough to hear some songbirds which begin singing in early spring.

By early April breeding pairs should be well established, and declaring their territories in song in the morning, so Peter's (not very!) early walk on Sunday 8 April will take advantage of this. Both walks will start outside the refreshments pavilion, and we will return there for tea and coffee afterwards. Please see the listings below for further details.

Christine Fairfax

Saturday & Sunday 10 & 11 February
Valentines Mansion Open House, 1.00-4.00pm.
Guided walks by VPC, 2.15 and 3.30pm.

Sunday 18 February
Birdwatching with Peter Hopkins,
2.00-4.00pm. Meet outside the Pavilion café.

Saturday 24 February
Pruning roses in the Old English Garden,
10.30am-12.30pm. Meet OEG.

Sunday 18 March - Annual General Meeting
With a short presentation on the life of Mrs Sarah Ingleby, the last private owner of Valentines Mansion. 2.00-4.30pm, Valentines Mansion. Minutes, agenda and further details will be sent shortly.

Saturday 31 March
Work in the Old English and/or Rose Gardens,
10.30-12.30. Meet OEG.

Sunday 8 April
Birdwatching with Peter Hopkins,
8.30-10.30am. Meet outside the Pavilion café.

Saturday 28 April
Manure Day! Plus planting the herbaceous beds,
10.30-12.30. Meet OEG.

Saturday 12 May
Valentines May Fair. Organised by the Friends of Valentines Mansion and Redbridge Arts Council. Details to be announced in the local press nearer the time.

Saturday 26 May
Work in the Old English and/or Rose Gardens,
10.30-12.30. Meet OEG.

Sunday 17 June
Strawberries, Roses and Mysteries. Picnic and (optional) quiz. 3.00-5.00pm, under the mulberry trees by the Aviary.

Saturday 30 June
Work in the Old English and/or Rose Gardens,
10.30-12.30. Meet OEG.

For further details of these events please contact Stephen Smith (020 8554) or Christine Fairfax (8551)

Informal mid-week work sessions

Tuesdays, 10.30am-12.30pm, on:

6 & 20 February	6 & 20 March
3 & 24 April	8 & 22 May
5 & 19 June	

For further details, please contact
Christine Fairfax