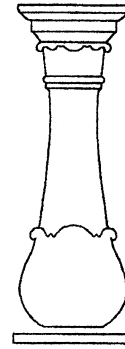


VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER

Honorary Vice Presidents: Mike Gapes MP Ted Fawcett OBE



www.valentinespark.org.uk

Issue no. 18 July 2004

At last!

It's the news we've been so long waiting for - our grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund has finally been awarded. Well done to everyone who worked so hard towards it. Our troubles are now over and at last the park can be restored to the beautiful place it once was ... If only it were that simple!

It's now that the real work begins. Questions have to be asked and compromises will have to be made as details of the restoration work are thrashed out. What period of planting and design should we restore to? For example, should the Bishops Walk be returned to the avenue of yews many of us remember, or to the hedged way that was most likely there in Georgian times? Will the mounts at either end of the Walk be restored, and if so, how will we overcome the problem which led to their disappearance 30 years ago (that of young cyclists racing down them and turning the area into a mudbath)? What about wildlife, areas for 21st century design, park rangers, and of course enough gardeners to establish and maintain the restored and replanted areas?

The work is just beginning, but it's great to have got this far.

Stephen Smith

The Great Railings Cover-up

It's not often that a number of different aspects of restoration can be dealt with in a single and simple project, but our *Hedge the Edge* weekend looks as if it will fit the bill.

Creating greater biodiversity; improving security; historically sympathetic; aesthetically pleasing; involving the local community: these are the buzzwords local authorities and funding bodies get so excited about.

By happy chance they also apply to the VPC's proposal to plant a mixed native-species hedge inside the Emerson Road railings, in front of Valentines Mansion. We hope to undertake this or a

very similar project over the weekend of 30 and 31 October, with soil preparation taking place on the Saturday and planting on the Sunday. Please see our Events Diary for further details.

Please do come along: the more volunteers, the easier the work will be. And with free refreshments provided, we hope this will be a social occasion as much as a working one!

Stephen Smith

Study day at Valentines Mansion

David Elcome, ecology lecturer and former RSPB Education Officer, will be coming to Valentines on Saturday 2 October to lead an illustrated study day on *Gilbert White's Life and Times and the Natural History of Selborne*.

Until the late 18th century, the study of wildlife was largely confined to stuffed and pickled specimens, although there was a growing interest in the natural world amongst aristocrats and traders such as Sir Charles Raymond, whose 'cabinet of curiosities' at Valentines Mansion included plants and animals collected during his travels abroad as a managing owner of East India Company ships.

However, while such men sought the unusual and exotic abroad, others were trying to understand the curiosities of the English countryside, as they monitored natural phenomena and observed wildlife. In 1768 a curate called Gilbert White began his 'Naturalist's Journal' in which he recorded his observations of living things and their environment in and around the Hampshire village where he lived and worked. In 1788 his book *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* was published. His writing inspired Charles Darwin a century later and many later naturalists and wildlife film-makers, and the book is now the fourth most published title in the English language.

If you would like to attend our study day please see the enclosed booking form for further details.

Christine Fairfax

The dog pond

An article in a recent issue of the Friends of Valentines Mansion's newsletter made passing reference to a 'dog pond', and this started a train of memory going back to the 1940s.

Our next door neighbours sometimes used to talk about a dog they had in the '30s, which had a disgusting habit of wallowing in a particularly muddy pond. On the site of this morass was built a splendid model yacht pond, which became a popular feature of this part of Valentines Park, which then had well tended flower beds and tall shrubs screening the houses in Quebec Road. Across the main path more tall and colourful shrubs distracted the eye from the tennis courts behind.

By the Perth Road entrance was a small car park, and a water garden that made good use of the stream which then fed the yacht pond and boating lake beyond. To my childish eyes this was a very attractive area of the park, even if the pond was sometimes too sheltered to get the best of the wind for my sailing yacht.

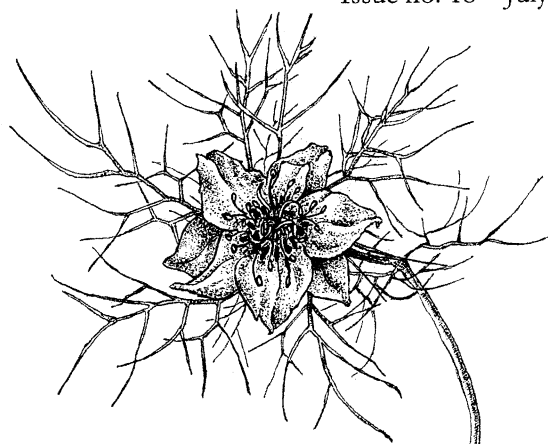
Some kids had clockwork or even steam speed-boats. Our neighbours who had the dog also had a son of eight or nine, who was the proud owner of a sleek and expensive model racing yacht. One morning he wanted to take it to the pond, and was allowed to go on his own (as children were in those days), on condition that if the air raid siren sounded he was to run home.

Soon after launching the siren did sound, and John had to make a quick decision: should he wait for the boat to drift in, or go home immediately as instructed? The dutiful son reluctantly abandoned the boat, and dashed home, coming back 20 minutes later with the 'all clear' still sounding.

Alas, the boat had disappeared. Since he could not believe it had been lost to enemy action, he had to conclude that someone had 'found' it, and he would not see it again. A hard lesson in the frailty of human nature and the cost of filial obedience!

Today, the stream that fed the yacht pond runs in a pipe out of sight (and scent), the pond is an arid concrete slab, and the planting is not much to enthuse about. One can only hope that the restoration scheme will have something to offer this area, which has become a featureless corridor between Perth Road and Valentines Park proper.

Ronald Smith



Seen in the park ...

Nigella: Love in a Mist



by Margaret Elvin

A new wood for London?

The Woodland Trust is a charity which aims to protect existing woods by purchasing them, and establish new ones by acquiring land and planting trees.

The Trust is now proposing to buy 130 acres of farmland adjacent to its existing Hainault Forest site (an ancient woodland, part of which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest) in order to create a new London wood. It describes this as a 'once in a lifetime opportunity' to create a native-species wood which will extend and buffer the existing site.

The Trust hopes the local community will become involved in this project, thereby connecting people with their local heritage and the natural environment. For example, schoolchildren could be involved in tree-planting and educational activities.

The Woodland Trust has begun its fundraising campaign by approaching funding bodies and launching a public appeal. It would like to hear people's opinions on the project, and would appreciate letters of support for their application for funding. The VPC committee has therefore written in support of this important venture.

If you would like further information about this project, or wish to support The Woodland Trust or become involved in its work, please contact Nick Morgan, Woodland Trust, PO Box 48, Brighton BN2 9TF, tel: 01273 626308 (mob: 07979 313285), or e-mail: nickmorgan@woodlandtrust.org.uk, quoting 04RDHAVERING.

We hope the new wood will be created. This, together with the restoration of Valentines Park and Mansion, will mean that some splendid projects are taking place locally.

Margaret Elvin

AGM report

Many thanks to all who attended our AGM in April, and made it such a useful meeting. We had a good turnout of members, and after the business meeting was over, James Wisdom, chair of the Friends of Gunnersbury Park and Museum, led a presentation and discussion on the history and restoration of Valentines' west London counterpart.

James gave us an insight into some of the problems encountered by his group both before and during Gunnersbury's restoration. Along with offering some entertaining anecdotes about how problems were overcome, he stressed the importance of working closely with leisure services management and ensuring restoration proposals reflected the aspirations of park users as well as consultants.

He also spoke of the importance of maintaining membership levels, which in his experience fell during periods of success, and recovered when controversy reigned!

James was assisted in his presentation by Mike Rowan (formerly Parks Manager at Hounslow, now at Mile End Park) and Valerie Bott of the Heritage Lottery Fund, both of whom brought different perspectives to the discussion.

Dinah and her team came up trumps again with a splendid afternoon tea, which helped make the event a very enjoyable occasion.

Stephen Smith

On 19 June Stephen Smith led VPC members on a tour of Eaton Square, which he manages as part of his work for the Duke of Westminster's Grosvenor Estate.

Although the square is maintained by funds from a wealthy estate, Stephen showed us photographs of beds and borders which had recently been as neglected as many of those in Valentines Park, and it's a mark of how much he and his small team have achieved over the past two years that the square's planting is now so structured, varied and healthy.

We came away with ideas on how Valentines could be similarly transformed. Many thanks to Stephen for leading this informative and enjoyable visit to one of London's famous private squares.

Karen Lane

Volunteer gardening projects

In June the park's contractors planted their summer bedding, and the VPC's Regency border, on the east side of Valentines Mansion, was looking very colourful. The foxgloves, Love in a Mist (*Nigella*), cornflowers and corncockle, interplanted with Sweet William, looked delightfully old-fashioned when in full bloom. In the Old English Garden the various shades of the Penstemons contrasted well with the silver *Artemesias*.

In the centre of the Rose Garden, we planted some species of climbing roses which were introduced to this country before 1874, and they are making healthy growth. We hope members will have a stroll round and enjoy seeing the work of our volunteers.

We recently saw a request for gardening classes from Redbridge council's Area 7 forum. Well, anyone wishing to learn some practical techniques could join our volunteer gardening sessions, when we have professional leadership from our chairman Stephen Smith, as well as working alongside experienced amateur gardeners. Please see the Events Diary for details of these sessions (usually held on the last Saturday in each month), and our special autumn project - the *Hedge the Edge* weekend - in October.

Christine Fairfax

The trees of Valentines Park VII

There are several examples of Chestnut tree in the park, including the Common Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), and two fine avenues of red-flowering trees which are probably mid-20th century plantings. One avenue, the earlier planting, runs directly in line from the Melbourne Road entrance, and the other runs diagonally from this first avenue towards the boating lake and the Dell.

The Common Horse Chestnut is native to western Asia and south-eastern Europe, and was introduced to Britain in the 16th century. Its name is said to date from this time, when Europeans found the Turks in Constantinople feeding the tree's nuts - the familiar conker - to sick horses, although animals would not normally eat them. However, hungry horses do gnaw the tree's bark, and an extract from it is used in veterinary medicine.

The genus *Aesculus* has several representatives in North America, the best known being Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*), and our red-flowered specimens are most likely to be *Aesculus carnea*, which is a hybrid of the Common Horse Chestnut and Red Buckeye. The Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) appears to be absent from the park.

At the end of the diagonal avenue of chestnuts, facing the boating lake, look left and admire a magnificent Copper Beech (*Fagus*), which is an American introduction and a popular ornamental planting in English parkland. Our specimen, probably an early 20th century planting, is around 60-70 feet tall (they can grow to 130 feet), and has a very fine, regular shape.

Janet Plimmer

A new park-keepers' base will soon be built, to replace the hut destroyed by fire. The building will be in the centre of the park, by the St John's Ambulance hut and overlooking the children's play area near the café. This new base and contact point is essential for improving public confidence in park security, and we are pleased that funding for it has been obtained - CF

Mrs Ingleby's garden party

The southern end of Valentines, around the boating lake, was opened to the public in 1899 as Central

Park. The estate around the mansion was still in private hands, but between 1901-05 local societies often held summer garden parties there by kind permission of the owner, Mrs Sarah Ingleby.

The *Ilford Guardian* and other local newspapers of the time show the wide-ranging sphere of Mrs Ingleby's influence. For example, the work of the Ilford Philanthropic Society appealed to her charitable nature, and she was the society's president for many years. According to the local press 'In spite of her four-score years Mrs Ingleby was blessed with a wonderful vitality' and she obviously enjoyed participating in a jolly occasion on Saturday 22 June 1901 when the Ilford Vocal Union and Orchestral Society held a garden party in the grounds of Valentines Mansion. The following week the *Ilford Guardian* reported that:

'Mrs Ingleby kindly placed the beautiful grounds of Valentines House at the disposal of the musicians, and about 220 of the members and their friends took the opportunity of renewing or making their acquaintance with this charming old country seat. For charming it is ... Its beauties never tire ...'

The *Guardian* describes the events of the day: 'Lawn tennis, croquet, bowls and boating provided ideal recreation' and 'About 200 sat down to the tea, which was served upon the lawn ... At about seven o'clock in the evening, the members of the Vocal Union formed a circle on the lawn opposite the house and sang in a sweet and tasteful manner ... Mrs Ingleby for a while sat outside and listened with evident pleasure, but the air growing rather chilly, she found it advisable to hear the latter part of the concert from an open window, where she joined heartily with the visitors in applauding the various contributions'.

After a programme which included pieces such as 'Believe me, if all those endearing young charms', 'Where art thou, beam of light', 'Toon, my delight' and 'The Empire Flag', the concert ended with the National Anthem, after which 'Mrs Ingleby ... came out and warmly thanked [conductor] Mr Storr and his choir for their excellent singing. There was nothing, she said, she enjoyed more'. Mr Storr proposed a vote of thanks to Mrs Ingleby, and she replied "... as long as I am spared I shall be very pleased to see you here ... I shall have the greatest pleasure in allowing you the use of the grounds' ... 'Thank you,' said the members of the Society in chorus.'

Christine Fairfax

EVENTS DIARY

Wednesday 21 July

Wildlife Gardening: a talk by Maya O'Hara of the London Wildlife Trust. Arranged by the Barkingside Agenda 21 group. 7.30pm, Fullwell Cross Library.

Saturday 24 July

Coach trip to Colchester and Beth Chatto Gardens. Now fully booked. Coach leaves Clarence Avenue, Gants Hill at 9.30am sharp. Any queries please contact Dinah Mullineux on (020) 8252

Saturday 31 July

General maintenance work in the Old English Garden, Regency Border and Rose Temple. Helpers welcome for any amount of time between 10.30am and 1.00pm. Meet by the Old English Garden.

Friday 6 August

Bat watching walk. Led by Linda Beard of the London Bat Group. Meet at 8.00pm near the sundial by Valentines Mansion. A few ultrasonic bat detectors will be available on the night, but please feel free to bring your own.

Saturday 28 August

General maintenance work in the Old English Garden, Regency Border and Rose Temple. Help welcome any time between 10.30am and 1.00pm. Meet Old English Garden.

Sunday 5 September

Early autumn birdwatching. Peter Hopkins leads another of his popular morning walks. 8.30-10.30am. Meet by the Pavilion café.

Saturday 18 & Sunday 19 September

London Open House weekend. Valentines Mansion will be open from 10.00am to 5.00pm. The VPC stall will offer merchandise and information, with members on hand to give advice and answer queries on all aspects of Valentines Park. Other VPC members will be giving demonstrations of horticultural work on the Regency border on the Saturday. If you would like to help run the stall on either day or take part in the demonstrations on Saturday, for any amount of time, please contact Julie Bradley on (020) 8554

Saturday 2 October

Gilbert White and the Natural History of Selborne. Informal study day led by David Elcome. Valentines Mansion, 9.45am-4.00pm. Please see the enclosed booking form for further details.

Saturday 30 & Sunday 31 October

Hedge the Edge weekend. The VPC plans to plant a mixed native-species hedge inside the Emerson Road railings in front of the mansion. Help welcome for any amount of time between 10.30am and 1.00pm on Saturday and/or Sunday. Meet by the Regency border. Free refreshments for all!

Sunday 7 November

Autumn birdwatching. Peter Hopkins' morning walk to identify some of the winter migrants, as well as resident species, that should be in the park. 8.30-10.30am. Meet by the Pavilion café.

Saturday 27 November

Restocking the Regency border and Conservatory beds. Help welcome any time between 10.30am and 1.00pm. Meet by the Regency border.

For further details of these events please contact:

*Julie Bradley - (020) 8554
Christine Fairfax - (020) 8551
or Stephen Smith - (020) 8554*

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Gill Faul - 01992

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