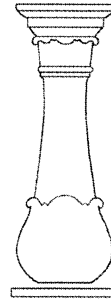


# VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS NEWSLETTER

Honorary Vice Presidents: Ted Fawcett OBE, Mike Gapes MP



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

Issue no. 28, June 2009

## Chairman's report - the VPC's future plans

Over the past year our commitment to the restoration of the park has continued in much the same vein as in the previous few years. Regular liaison meetings between the VPC committee and Redbridge Leisure Services continue to look at concerns arising from the restoration process, and our monthly Saturday morning work sessions have continued under Peter Knight's watchful eye.

We had a number of successes in 2008/9, notably our coach outing to Polesden Lacey and Guilford, the revival of our newsletter under Karen Lane, and the official recognition of the park's pollarded Field Maple as a veteran tree, thanks to the efforts of Julie Bradley and Peter Knight.

Simon Litt's appointment as park manager has dramatically changed the quality of the horticultural element of the park's restoration, and our support for him and his team should be making a real difference to the enhancement and establishment of the park's new planting.

As Simon takes on the daunting task of putting Valentines back on the horticultural map, so the VPC committee realises that a re-doubling of effort is needed to give his team the support it needs. At the same time, the committee also needs new blood.

As a committee, many of us have been actively campaigning for more than ten years, and we feel we have reached a watershed. A number of us wish to take a break, but we also see that the group needs to re-focus and continue to support the process which has begun with the big investment of the Lottery and council cash.

With this in mind, the current committee is happy to continue until September 2009, giving the group time to think about the direction in which it ought to be going. On Saturday 12 September we will hold an Extraordinary General Meeting at Gants Hill Methodist Church, to take a serious look at our future plans. All members are invited to attend: please see our Events Diary for further details.

I'm sure this meeting will stir thoughts and provoke some questions, and that over the summer members will generate ideas for our future structure and focus.

In the meantime I know that Simon has plans for an autumn project that we can well support ...

*Stephen Smith*

## Going down south - this year's autumn planting project

Our autumn project this year will be to plant the beds near the park's southernmost Perth Road entrance with species from the southern hemisphere.

Park manager Simon Litt will be buying a range of drought-resistant plants native to Australia, South Africa and South America, and park staff will prepare the beds, prior to VPC members planting them over the weekend of 24 and 25 October.

We hope to create some attractive beds in this long-neglected corner of the park, displaying examples of the kinds of plants that will thrive in the dryer conditions we can expect in future.

Our past autumn projects have been enjoyable social events, appealing to many VPC members. If you'd like to join us this year, please bring along one or two of your own gardening tools, and refreshments if required, although the Sunday session will end with a 'topping out' ceremony followed by refreshments in the new Valentines Mansion café. Please see our Events Diary for further details.

## Membership renewals

*Recent membership renewals have been received with much appreciation by the VPC committee, as have the generous donations made to the Restoration Fund. Those of you who have not yet renewed will find a reminder letter enclosed to use if you wish. We greatly thank all past and present members for their invaluable support of the VPC's work over the years.*

*Margaret Elvin*

## **The man who saved Valentines Park**

Frederick Hooper Dane was, according to the headline of his obituary in the Ilford Recorder of 27 October 1955, 'THE MAN WHO SAVED VALENTINES PARK FOR ILFORD'. This isn't an example of the Recorder exaggerating the importance of some local dignitary, but an honest comment.

Mr Dane was chairman of Ilford Urban District Council when the parts of the park such as the Glade, pleasure gardens and other gardens around the mansion were bought by the council from the Town Planning Company in 1912. When the purchase was complete, Councillor Dane officially opened the park extension and was presented with a ceremonial key - now in the local history museum - to mark the event. It could also be said to commemorate his role in the long campaign to save the park and mansion for Ilford and from the builders who were always looking for new land in the area.

FH Dane's interest in Valentines and Ilford's open spaces goes back to 1906, and possibly to 1894 when, 23 years old and newly married, he moved to Ilford. Preserving and enhancing the area's parks was one of the causes that motivated him to stand as the Conservative candidate for Cranbrook ward in 1906, which is when Holcombe Ingleby donated large parts of the Valentines estate to the council and was trying to sell them the rest. Councillor Dane won this election and went on to represent Cranbrook and, as far as we know, be a good friend of Valentines until the Labour party took control of the council in 1945.

During his 39 years as a councillor, FH Dane was deputy mayor twice, Ilford's first mayor when it achieved borough status in 1926, and one of the three members of the council who ran the borough during the early parts of the Second World War.

In addition to his local political work, Mr Dane was an Essex county councillor, a Justice of the Peace, chairman of the governors of Ilford County High School, founder of the Ilford Trustee Savings Bank, President of Ilford Football Club - apparently he rarely missed a match at their Lynn Road ground - and President of the Ilford Schools' Football Association. As if that wasn't enough, he found time to run his cigar-merchant business, support Ilford Cricket Club and the Ilford Operatic Society, and play a good game of bowls!

FH Dane died at his home in Chelmsford Road, aged 83. The Recorder obituary says of him, "He

had disagreed with many, as any honest man must, and he may have made mistakes - in 40 years he was certain to do that - but Frederick Hooper Dane had always the courage of his convictions and what he said he honestly meant". Luckily for us, his convictions included knowing how important Valentines was to Ilford - and he certainly didn't make a mistake in that.

*David Lane*

## **Clearing the Boating Lake, 16 April 2009**

With the engineers finishing the Boating Lake work near the island, the water rising and no sign of any litter being removed, my friend Ian and I decided it needed sorting out.

After e-mailing several people who were hopeful prospects for assisting us, I had another volunteer in Tom. So the three of us met, Ian slipped into the waders recently purchased via the internet, and we proceeded.

The weather report had not been good, and the drizzle was steady. We began on the Cowling Shelter side of the lake and worked our way back to the bank by the wishing well. Four rusty litter bins and approximately 15 bags-worth of various bottles, cans and plastic bags came out.

Moving back to the water near the Boathouse, we saw some strange flat snails (which later research told us were Ramshead snails), a large dead carp, and additional cans and bottles, etc. A shopping trolley proved too much even for Ian and we had to leave it in situ. But our intrepid wader-wearer managed with Tom's help to remove two large and heavy commemorative benches (or bits of them), a very smelly dead duck, assorted Yellow Pages and a headless Buddha.

By this time we were on the Ilford town side of the lake and time was getting on, so we had to regrettably leave the job unfinished.

However it was satisfying to see the pile of rubbish that came out, even though we were all soaked. Thanks to Tom Wenham and Ian Cranston, and park manager Simon Litt for giving us the go-ahead to do the work.

If anyone wants to give me an e-mail address for the next time such a job comes up, you are welcome to join us but I warn you, it might be mucky.

For those who worry about the swans and ducks, Simon Litt and the park keepers do keep a watchful eye on them.

*Julie Bradley*

Many thanks to Simon Litt for leading VPC members on a tour of the western edges of the park and the areas around the Boating Lake on Saturday 16 May. The interest lay in Simon showing us some newly-planted beds and features that many of us had overlooked or not visited recently – such as the Swamp Cypress saplings planted in two corners of the Boating Lake's Cranbrook Road bank. They were exact little replicas of the great Swamp Cypress which stands between the Long Water and Fish Pond in the north of the park, and which they should equal in about 70 years' time.

Thanks also to Simon for inviting us back for free tea and coffee and a time to chat in an otherwise-closed mansion. Just like the old days!

In August Simon will be leading a walk around the American Gardens, Fish Pond and Nature Area, and to the lower Perth Road entrance in order to outline his ideas for the 'southern hemisphere' beds which VPC members will be planting during our *Going Down South* weekend in October. Please see our Events Diary for further details.

## Jazz at the mansion again

Swing outfit *Who Else for Jazz?* made a welcome return to Valentines on Saturday 9 May, playing in the newly-restored mansion for the first time, and with new vocalist David Deacon.

The band made the most of the excellent acoustics in the enlarged Drawing Room, and performed an accomplished set which amply demonstrated their progress since their very first outing, at the mansion in June 2003. Derek Else produced a full, mellow sound on clarinet, Gerald Elvin excelled on a series of double-bass solos, Michael Nichols' drumming was solid and inventive throughout, consistently-able pianist Frederick Upcraft was particularly impressive on his boogie-woogie *St Louis Blues*, and David Deacon added an extra dimension with his expressive, well-delivered vocals. The charm of the attractive, intimate setting and the sunny spring weather further contributed to a very pleasant evening.

*Who Else For Jazz?* are now having a few months' rest while one or two members travel the world, but hopefully the band will be returning to the mansion before long.

*Karen Lane*

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## Valentines' great Field Maple celebrated

In our last newsletter, Peter Knight reported that Valentines' ancient Field Maple had been designated one of 20 Great Trees of London by the charity Trees for Cities. A plaque-planting ceremony duly took place beside our Great Tree on 18 March 2009. The plaque, which reads '*Great Trees of London. The Valentine [sic] Maple ... Awarded 18 November 2008 by Trees for Cities ...*', is now mounted on a small log plinth in front of the tree.



VPC members Jeff & Margaret Godden, Peter Knight, Simon Litt, Julie Bradley, Patricia Spence, Margaret Elvin, and Carol & Ron King of the Roding Valley Park group. Photograph courtesy of Julie Bradley, taken by Julian Hills of LB Redbridge.

Resident in the park ...



Fox - *Canis vulpes*  
by Margaret Elvin

## EVENTS DIARY

### **Saturday 27 June & Saturday 25 July**

*General maintenance work in the gardens and grounds around Valentines Mansion. Helpers welcome for any amount of time between 10.30am-1.00pm on both days. Meet by the mansion's porte cochere.*

### **Saturday 1 August**

*Coach outing to Royal Tunbridge Wells and Penshurst Place. All tickets now sold, so just a reminder that the coach leaves Clarence Avenue, Gants Hill, at 9.15am.*

### **Saturday 15 August**

*Guided tour of Valentines Park. Park manager Simon Litt leads a walk around the American Gardens, Fish Pond, Nature Area, and beds by the lower Perth Road entrance. Meet 10.30am, Valentines Mansion porte cochere. The walk should last 45 minutes to an hour.*

### **Saturday 29 August**

*Another of the VPC's regular gardening mornings, working in the grounds around Valentines Mansion. 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet by the porte cochere.*

### **Saturday 12 September**

*Extraordinary General Meeting. 3.00-4.30pm, Gants Hill Methodist Church, Gants Hill Crescent. A VPC members-only meeting to discuss future plans and socialise over refreshments. Admission free.*

### **Saturday 26 September**

*General maintenance of the gardens and grounds around the mansion. 10.30am-1.00pm. Meet by the porte cochere, Valentines Mansion.*

### **Sunday 4 October**

*Birdwatching with Peter Hopkins. Peter leads a walk to look at some of the park's autumn residents and visitors. 8.30-10.30am. Meet by the Pavilion café.*

### **Sunday 11 October**

*Illustrated talk at Valentines Mansion. Early evening presentation by a special guest speaker. Further details and booking form to follow nearer the time.*

### **Saturday 24 & Sunday 25 October**

*Going Down South weekend. Our autumn project, to plant the beds near the southernmost Perth Road entrance with species native to the southern hemisphere. 10.30am-1.00pm on both days. Meet by the lower Perth Road gates. Please bring one or two of your own gardening tools, and refreshments if required, although the Sunday session will end with a 'topping out' ceremony, followed by refreshments in the new Valentines Mansion café.*

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Gill Stuart - 01992

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