

# Valentines Mansion, Ilford, Essex

## A brief history of the Mansion, its owners and its architecture



May 2006

### Origins and owners

What became the Valentines Estate was created in 1688 on a site occupied by a smaller house of which no trace remains. It was developed by Sir Thomas Skipwith, Baronet, and passed to Elizabeth Tillotson who is thought to have had the Mansion built in 1696 with her son in law, James Chadwick. She was the widow of John Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury, who had died in 1694. His portrait still hangs in Lambeth Palace. He was a pragmatic churchman, typical of the late seventeenth century Anglican clergy, who was more interested in the solidity of Church and State than the spiritual niceties of doctrinal disputes and dogmatic wrangles.

### In the eighteenth century

Following the death of Mrs Tillotson in 1702, the Mansion was bought by George Finch and on his death in 1714 it passed to his son William Finch. It is not known what, if any, improvements they made and although descendants of the family survive today and one has visited the Mansion there seem to be no records of their occupation of the house. Robert Surman then bought the property in 1724. Surman, a London banker and speculator who, as deputy cashier to the South Sea Company, was heavily involved in the South Sea Bubble crisis of 1720. He owned a number of properties in Essex which he had to sell at the time of the Bubble when much of his money was confiscated by the state. However, his fortunes had rallied sufficiently by 1724 when he acquired Valentines and he enlarged and improved the house and the grounds and gardens. The Rococo landscapes were created during his occupancy and the east bay window was added, probably so that he could see the gardens from inside the house. In 1754 it was sold to Sir Charles Raymond, Baronet, who also acquired the Cranbrook and Highlands Estates soon afterwards.

### A quotation

Peter Muilman's **A new and complete history of Essex** Volume IV (1781) described the house as:

*the seat of Charles Raymond Esq., High Sheriff of this County for the present year 1771; and it may, with great propriety, be called a Cabinet of Curiosities. This building is one of the neatest, and best adapted of its size, of any modern one in the County; its ornaments are well chosen, and the grounds belonging to it laid out with great Judgement and Taste.*

This flattering description was accompanied by an engraving which showed the garden front behind an impressive set of gate piers and railings which are still in existence but were moved to the Bethell Avenue entrance to the Park. It is nice to see the Mansion referred to as a 'modern' house and it should make us remember that today's 'old' houses were once new.

### Charles Raymond

Much historical research has been done recently by Georgina Green on the subject of Charles Raymond. He was originally a ship's captain for the East India Company. It is known that he made a number of voyages to India between 1734 and 1746 on a ship named the Wager. Although the ships traded for the Company, captains were allowed some space for their own private business and many made good profits on this. Raymond was no exception and it was with this money that he managed to buy Valentines in 1754. At this stage he was still connected with the Company and had become a Principal Managing Owner. This meant that he retired from the sea and paid others to sail the ships that continued to bring him a sizeable income. Georgina Green's research has revealed that in later life, Raymond owned a ship actually called 'The Valentine' which finished its days in a shipwreck off the coast

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of Guernsey. Divers have found the wreck and it is to be hoped that more information will become available in due course.

### **The local links with the East India Company**

The Company was founded by a charter from Queen Elizabeth 1 in 1600. Sir Thomas Rowe of Leyton was Ambassador to The Great Moghul in 1614. Rowe died and was buried in Woodford in 1644.

Sir Josiah Child, who was one of the most influential officials with the East India Company, lived at (the then) dilapidated Wanstead House and it was his son who built the splendid new Wanstead House, which in its heyday was said to rival Versailles. His relative Sir Caesar Child of Claybury also had connections with the East India Company, being the son of the President of the Council at Surat in India.

Charles Foulis of Harts House was an exact contemporary of Raymond's and his career followed a similar path in that he started as a captain and finished as a Managing Owner. He had a ship called 'Woodford'. Both he and Raymond became great forces in the shipping lobby of the East India Company.

### **Charles Welstead**

Valentines was sold several times after Raymond's death in 1788. Donald Cameron owned it between 1788 and 1797; then it passed to Robert Wilkes who in 1808 sold it to Charles Welstead. Welstead is believed to have carried out extensive works to the house in 1811. Indeed, it is during this period that the main entrance was moved from the south front to its present location on the north elevation. The porte cochere was added by Welstead to give character to his new entrance and the vestibule with its fine lantern light connected this new addition to the main house just as it does today.

**Charles Holcombe** Following Welstead's death in 1830 his executors sold the Mansion to Charles Holcombe in 1838. He lived there with his wife and his niece Sarah Oakes, who married Clement Ingleby, moved to Edgbaston and then returned to Valentines with her husband and four children following her uncle's death in 1869. Mr and Mrs Ingleby added the two-storey wing to the north east in 1871 and probably extended the sweep of the porte cochere by adding a new bay at each end. Mrs Ingleby was a noted benefactress in Ilford and she lived to a good age, not dying until 1906. 47 acres of the park had already been sold to Ilford Urban District Council in 1897 and opened as Central Park in 1899. Mrs Ingleby's heir (Holcombe Ingleby) donated some more land after his mother's death and the Council soon bought more of the parkland and in 1912 purchased the house and a further 37 acres. The Middlefield Farm land was purchased in 1924 thus creating all of what is now Valentines Park.

**Municipal occupation** When the Council bought the house, it had little idea what to do with it. The farm buildings and stables just north of the house were demolished to make way for tennis courts and the house, at least for a while was used as changing accommodation. A brass plaque in the Entrance Hall commemorates the fact that Belgian refugees were "entertained" in the house during the Great War.

**Public Health** In 1925 the Public Health department moved from the site of the Old Central Library into the Mansion on a "temporary" basis and, sure enough, they were there for 40 years. Many visitors who may be categorised as no longer young remember having jabs and dental work done there.

### Housing

When the London Borough of Redbridge was formed in 1964 the Mansion became the Council's Housing department. This went on until 1993 when Housing moved to new offices off Broadmead Road and the Mansion has been empty since then and looking for a meaningful use.

### The Mansion - a brief description

#### The exterior generally

The house in essence is a rectangular structure, now three storeys high and dating from the 1690s with mid C18 and early C19 additions and alterations. Early in the C20 it underwent some restoration when it passed into the hands of the Ilford Urban District Council but no change was made to the basic form of the building. Attached to the main house is a single storey Kitchen and Dairy Wing.

#### The South elevation

The garden front is of five bays, with two bay segmental bows on each side. It is built of yellow brick with extensive red brick dressings, a stone string course at first floor level and a modillion cornice below the parapet. The central first floor window is distinguished by a pediment and a decorative stone surround. It was fronted by a Regency balcony with a lead canopy but the Muilman engraving and a 1799 watercolour in the Guildhall Library show it to have been without the canopy and this was therefore removed during the 2000 external restoration works. The Muilman engraving also shows an entrance porch on this elevation. These works are likely to have been part of Raymond's improvements of 1769, a date which is found upon a cast iron hopper head on the north side of the house.

#### The South Porch

The main entrance to the house was moved from the south to the north elevation by Charles Welstead when he built the porte cochere, probably in 1810/11. This was evidenced by old engravings which showed a porch on the south elevation. In 2004, when the South Terrace paving was being re-laid and restored, it was decided to excavate to see what trace, if any, remained of the foundations of such a porch. Remarkably,

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virtually the whole of the brick footings were still there, just below the surface of the stone paving and the asphalt path. Specialist archaeologists uncovered as much as was needed to make a detailed photographic record and the foundations were then covered up again.

### **The North Elevation**

The north side of the house is similarly of yellow brick with red brick dressing. It sports a Venetian window set slightly to the east of centre. The front is dominated by the arresting neo-classical porte-cochere (or carriage entrance) consisting of a segmental arcade of Doric columns. It has a brick floor much of which is in good condition although some bricks have been reversed where the original surface has been damaged. This porte-cochere is connected to the house by a lantern-capped porch: the lantern is entwined with ogee glazing bars. The main subsequent addition was the two-storey extension at the north east corner, built in matching materials to the rest of the house in 1871. The north elevation is generally not as appealing as the south since it was never intended to be used for the main entrance to the house.

### **The Dairy Wing**

The Service (or kitchen, or dairy) Wing to the west is thought to have formerly been an orangery: the 1799 watercolour showed a pair of stone lions positioned over the centre of this single storey building. These lions, in an almost unrecognisably eroded condition, still exists on the park entrance off Bethel Avenue. The orangery had a series of tall windows along its south front and was two bays longer than it is today. It was subsequently converted into a dairy and service accommodation with a timber colonnade on the north front: this covered passage with Doric columns was restored in 2000 and leads into a the Dairy Wing corridor. The kitchen, as mentioned

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above, appears to be of slightly later construction and sits on less robust foundations. Inside the whole suite, the kitchen and other rooms are extremely well preserved. A large Victorian kitchen range and a smaller range are still in place, and were impressively restored by specialist iron work conservators in 2004. A fine slate workbench is in good condition in the Diary room at the far west.

**Inside the house** Valentines Mansion is extremely well preserved with much early C18 panelling and joinery remaining. The casual visitor is often shocked to see what appears to be municipal vandalism and much has been said about the intrusive light fittings, conduits, surface mounted cables and various modern accretions which combine to prevent the Mansion being seen at its best. However, it is important to recognise that all these disfigurements are easily removed and that the house, for all its scruffy and down at heel appearance, has a wealth of original features and is in fact a real gem of survivals and vernacular architecture.

**The main stairs** The main staircase is an oak well stair with twisted balusters, three to a step, carrying a broad handrail with plain, square newel posts. Raised and fielded oak panels line the wall as one ascends the stair. The balusters seem in too good a condition and too regular and ‘machine made looking’ to be original and the blocks of wood at the tread-ends seem too crude to be anything but a more recent afterthought. Opinion seems to vary as to the age of the stair but it is possible that the transfer of the main entrance from the south to the north may have also involved the reconstruction of the stair.

The stair hall is dominated by the Venetian window with the

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remains of brightly coloured Regency glass. The staircase leading up to the second floor is probably original, consisting of two flights of chunky urn and baluster rails of a characteristically late seventeenth type.

### **Fireplaces**

The exotic fireplace in the present reception room is undeniably odd with its hybrid medley of eagles' heads, lion bosses, drapery panels, gadrooned central pediment etc. This is probably to be regarded as a bizarre provincial freestone chimneypiece, employing motifs similar to those encountered on some churchyard monuments of the early C18. It is the antithesis of Palladianism. There are several very fine fireplaces elsewhere including a number of pieces from the house's earliest period on the first floor with fish scale brackets. The attic retains many of the original plain fire surrounds characterised by quarter circle corners. The best single fireplace is that in the breakfast room, with a central panel of 'landscape' marble (now known to be from Cotham near Bristol) amid a very fine statuary fireplace of the 1760s. Opening up work around the house has revealed several intact fire-baskets including one with an integral ash bucket.

### **The panelling and joinery**

This has survived remarkably well and is of considerable interest. There was considerable reworking of the house in the 1760s, when the new bow windows were added and much of the internal appearance may date from this period. The segmental bays received curved panelling and window seats which survive well: the original library, occupying the south west corner contains such seats together with early glazed shelving around the door. A number of rooms still have early box cornices and the billiard room is a good example of this. Many of the early doors survive, although possible not in their

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original locations, and most have retained their brass door furniture. Some are set amid bolection-moulded doorcases, particularly at first floor level. One highly unusual survival is the set of sockets on the rear of the ground floor shutters: these would originally have received spring mounted bells and served as burglar alarms, alerting the occupants of the house to any disturbance from outside. As Muilman's description, cited above, makes clear, Valentines contained many things well worth breaking in for, including at one stage, Hogarth's painting 'Southwark Fair'.

**Decorative glass** Other internal fittings of note include the very attractive Regency painted glass transparency in the main first floor room. This consists of a romantic scene of a ruined castle by a river in moonlight; its companion has sadly gone but will be replicated when the Mansion is restored. Such transparencies are seldom found in domestic contexts which makes this survival all the more interesting. There is also a roundel of a pastoral scene. The window has decorative border strips of coloured glass with matching Tudor rose motifs that probably date from the same time as the balcony, i.e. circa 1811. Two of these were missing (one to make way for a late twentieth century louvre window) but both were replaced during the restoration in 2000. Border glass of the same pattern would have continued around the arch to the fanlight above the windows and, again, this will be replaced during the restoration scheme.

**East Bedroom** It is worth dwelling for a moment in this room to consider the rich history of internal decorative schemes. The room is part of the Surman alterations in the late 1720s and it cannot be known what the original scheme was but it was likely to have

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been raised and fielded panelling, some of which still survives. Decorators' signatures and calculations on the wall survive from the 1720s (Surman's residency) and 1809/10 when Welstead had the house but not from the Raymond period.

At some stage the good panelling was removed and perhaps at least one wall was covered with a wall hanging. Later, there is clear evidence that the walls were covered with a hessian type fabric which was lined with paper and stiffened to provide a background for a patterned wallpaper. This technique needs more investigation but there is a striking example of it being use recently in the partial restoration at Kirby Hall, near Corby in Northants

### **The cellar**

This contains two vaults with niches for bottles and vegetable storage etc. These have good quality brick floors. The rest of the cellar floor was of brick but this was taken up in recent years and re-laid with about 6 inches of concrete.

Various brick piers were constructed at some time, possibly to support the ground floor above but also possibly to turn the rooms into an air raid cellar during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. The walls to the cellar and the piers have been covered with modern cementitious Tyrolean finish which is ugly and obtrusive and spoils what is a very interesting piece of space. Shelving racks that were installed by the Council have now been removed and the cellar feels more spacious. The well over which the cellar was built is once again visible.

### **'Secret' passage**

Work carried out to break up a concrete slab outside the 1871 wing in 2003 revealed a sunken 'room' which leads into a passage that runs under the north east part of the floor of the

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ground floor of the Wing. This passage appears to then splay off along the line of the bay window on the east elevation. There are two theories about what the passage was for. The more interesting of the two proposes that the passage led into the vaults in the cellars and indeed there is evidence in the vaults of bricked up door openings at their eastern end. The house floor plan from the 1840s notes a “passage to cellars” but the location is different. More excavation work will be carried out as part of the restoration contract.

### **The gardens and parkland**

Valentines Park is listed in the English Heritage ‘Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England’ and is Grade II. Recent work on the park Restoration scheme has revealed that this is a park of distinction with a surprising degree of C18 survival. Now a municipal park, Valentines contains several interesting remains of the park so fulsomely praised by Mulman in 1771. Daniel Lysons stated that the gardens as well as the house were enlarged and improved by Robert Surman, owner of Valentines between 1724 and 1754 and the grounds are fully commensurate with the taste of a wealthy City man of the day. The overall impression is one of a late Baroque formal garden, characterised by the formal canal, with later C18 modifications, notably the fishpond with an island to the east of the canal.

**The water courses** The three main areas of water run in a north-easterly direction and extends for over 400 metres. Once fed by a spring they consist today of an upper reservoir pond (the Horse Pond), a long principal canal (the Long Water) and a lower lake (the Fishpond or Ornamental Pond) which may originally also have been a canal but is thought to have undergone picturesque modifications during Raymond's alterations of the 1760s.

**The Long Water** The Long Water has a grotto at the western end and a grotto shelter with an alcove seat on the south bank. This has an asymmetrically placed niche from which an observer would have looked across the canal down an avenue running north east towards a feature that has now vanished but is shown on a mid C19 sale plan. The walls to the canal are of brick and the original design would have had lawns running down to the canal-side edge of this brickwork. The banks are now overgrown and unfortunate tree planting has spoilt the original design idea.

**The Dovecote** The best remaining outhouse is the mid C18 dovecote, an octagonal building of red and purple brickwork with ogee windows. Its tower is carried on two brick arches. In recent years it has been supported by timber shores to prevent collapse. Attached to the dovecote is a small granary store supported on staddle stones to keep out the rats. This may well be the oldest of the surviving garden buildings.

**Other Garden features** Other notable garden features include:

- The early C18 stone sun dial baluster (the dial is missing) which is stored inside the Mansion for later erection in the

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middle of the grass circle immediately outside the main entrance

- The restored Victorian ironwork obelisk in the Old English Garden and the hoops in the centre of the Rose Garden.
- The southern grotto, at the western end of the Fishpond

### **Walled Gardens and Gates**

The walled gardens, and in particular the charming entrances into the parterre garden from the south are splendid survivals and rare indeed in the context of a modern park. There is a pair of fine early C18 gate piers, with decorated urns, now supporting the gates at the Bethell Avenue entrance to the park. These originally stood at the gates which led to the Mansion when the main entrance was at the south front. The Kitchen Garden was used as a plant nursery until the 1980s but now presents a sad air of dereliction and semi-wilderness. This will be restored as proper kitchen garden during the forthcoming park restoration works.

### **The Ha-Ha (s)**

There are two ha-has, one running north south about 50 yards from the house and the other near the ancient cedar tree north east of the main gardens. For those who are unfamiliar with the term, a 'ha ha' is a sort of ditch cut along the edge of a formal garden and built so that people using the gardens could see cattle or sheep grazing on pastures that appeared to be all part of the gardens – but the ditch prevented the cattle getting in! Recent archaeological work has revealed that there was a further ha-ha running along the south bank of the Long Water. It is thought likely that this extended down past the fishpond and joined up with the ha-ha that is located near the cedar tree. This would have meant that the family could have enjoyed walks throughout the whole of the gardens with cattle grazing at a safe distance, thus preserving personal and plant security

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and the appearance of a rustic simplicity in the landscape.

### **The Hampton Court vine**

The current vine at Hampton Court was grown from a Black Hamburgh cutting taken from the gardens at Valentines. The original vine no longer survives in the park but in recent years a cutting has been taken from Hampton Court and planted in the kitchen garden at Valentines. Thus the circle is now complete. However, a fresh cutting from Hampton Court will be planted as part of the restoration project for the park.

### **Conservation Plan for the Mansion**

Architects and architectural historians completed a Conservation Plan for the Mansion in 2004, the contents of which will inform the design of the internal restoration scheme for the house. The work carried out comprised a room by room analysis of the house, a paint analysis and detective work based on the above to try to piece together a history of how the house has changed over the 300 or more years since it was built.

### **Paint analysis**

A specialist consultant was retained to carry out a paint analysis of all rooms and communal spaces. This sort of work is useful in informing decisions about the colour schemes which will need to be chosen when the restoration contract is nearing completion. It also serves in aiding architectural research into the history of the changes in the house. Certain paints and colours are known to have come from certain periods and where walls have been moved or layouts modified, the paint analysis can help to understand what actually happened. If you're lucky, that is! It is not an exact science and some of the "findings" can be misleading and need to be analysed along with other evidence before a conclusion can be drawn.

### **The Panelling**

As is often the case, the paint analysis posed as many questions as it answered. One of the interesting results is the history of the panelling, much of which was always thought to be original. The paint analysis and other investigation now suggest that a good deal of the panelling may have been moved about and it is difficult to be sure that any of it is in its original position. The panelling in the Breakfast Room is thought to be of the Victorian Period.

### **The Mansion extended in the 1760s**

There is some evidence that the house was originally smaller than we see today, with the western quarter being a later addition, possibly added by Charles Raymond in the 1760s. This is partially supported by the position of the Venetian Window which would have been central to the house if and when it was only three quarters of its current size. It is also suggested that he re-faced the brickwork of the whole house, added the two south bows, a new roof structure and built a new second floor to replace the former servants' quarters which were originally in a garret space, possibly with dormer windows. Much of this is conjectural and will not be confirmed until more 'opening up' work is done as part of the restoration contract.

### **The 'original' house**

To envisage what may have been the original house you have to think of the Mansion today and imagine the walls stopped just above the first floor. Immediately above this would be the lower part of the roof slope. The roof would have gone up to ridge level with dormer windows to allow light into what must have been a quite gloomy and confined series of spaces. Inside the current roof structure there are traces of very old wallpaper which is a good indication that the layout was

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originally different to what we see today. Imagine the transformation of the house to the seventeenth century observer.

### **Wood carvings**

One of the few bits of documentary evidence from the earliest period of the house is a reference to some Grinling Gibbons wood carvings. The paint analyst uncovered the chimney piece panel in the middle, east bedroom and found evidence of carvings having been fixed there with the faintly discernible outlines of what the carvings may have looked like. There are the “ghosts” of birds (perhaps parrots or similar), material swags, and a shelf for a decorative urn. It is likely that these were removed sometime between Raymond’s work in the 1760s and Welstead’s improvement in the 1810s. However, it is fascinating to see some evidence of what had been thought of as an apocryphal tale.

### **Summary**

This has been no more than a quick run through the unravelling mystery that is Valentines Mansion. Much more will be learned, it is to be hoped, during the course of the restoration contract. A more extensive booklet on the history and architecture of the house will be published when the house opens for business and perhaps some of the puzzles will be resolved and we will finally understand more about how the house was built and how it was altered both inside and out.

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