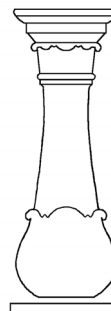


VALENTINES PARK CONSERVATIONISTS FUNDING AND ACTIVITIES UPDATE

Issue no. 13 November 2002



The Heritage Lottery Fund bid

In September 2002 Redbridge's chief Leisure officer Nigel Burch reported that the lottery bid for the park had successfully passed the first stage of the process. This means that in principle the park has been allocated just over £3 million. However, two further criteria must be met before the council can be certain of receiving the award:

- i) Further work needs to be done on archaeological surveys, establishing water quality in the park's lakes and streams, and investigating the walls and built features earmarked for restoration.
- ii) Detailed costings of the above must be submitted by the end of March 2003, as part of the second stage bid.

The second stage bid should be assessed by the HLF by the end of June 2003 and, if approved, work on projects should start three months later, once tenders have been invited for design work.

The lottery bid for the restoration of Valentines Mansion has not been successful so far. One of the reasons cited by the HLF for its failure was that it was insufficiently linked to the schemes in the park's bid.

Archaeology in the park

The archaeological surveys mentioned above have been progressing during the past few months, with the firm Oxford Archaeology carrying out a geophysical survey in the 'historical formal' area between the playing fields of Valentines High School and the mansion. A decision has been made to do some trenching, and the park's managers indicated that this might begin in November 2002. One purpose of the work will be to establish the original layouts of the paths and boundaries around the American Gardens, Bishop's Walk, Long Water and formal walled gardens. The VPC has been

asked if some of our members would like to watch the trenching, so this may be an ideal opportunity to learn more about the park's past as it is literally uncovered.

The park's location beside a significant mediaeval route to Barking Abbey, and the presence of artesian [natural] wells, indicate that it could have contained settlements over many periods of history. For example, a high-quality Roman lead coffin was found during landscaping work on the Valentines estate in 1724. With today's modern techniques for identifying soil disturbance, trenching and dating, we are very keen to see what may come to light during this work.

Members who would like to be informed about the dig should write to VPC secretary Christine Fairfax at 84 Redbridge Lane East, Ilford, Essex IG4 5EZ. Please include your telephone number.

Funding from the Area 7 committee

Members may be aware that in 2001 the VPC was granted approximately £3000 from the discretionary budget allocated to Area 7, which covers the Redbridge wards of Cranbrook, Newbury and Valentines. The money was used to pay for design work and plants for the new Regency-style border beside Valentines Mansion.

The border was planted with shrubs and hardy perennials in November 2001. In February 2002 the VPC sowed hardy annual seeds, and in late spring and summer we weeded and tended the plants. During July and August we photographed the border, which looked wonderful with the pinks, purples and blues of lithrum, monarda, phlox and campanula, while autumn has brought attractive seed heads and variegated hollies. At the end of September we collected seeds from the much-loved clary, nigella and hollyhocks before clearing some plants to make space for many of the 3000 bulbs which we planted on 26 October. We would like to

thank all our members have contributed in any way to the success of this project so far.

On 18 September 2002 officer Nigel Burch applied on our behalf to the Area 7 committee for further funding, and we were pleased to be granted £3220. This will be spent on the following:

i) £1720 for a local craftsman to restore the ironwork in the 'rose temple' at the centre of the historic Rose Garden near the mansion. This will be similar to the restoration of the ironwork in the neighbouring Old English Garden, which we commissioned three years ago.

ii) £750 for a stone urn for the centre of the rose temple, to replace the one which stood there from 1870 to the 1970s. Over the past few years the bulbs and plants we have put in this area have been damaged by cyclists. Therefore, hopefully this urn will act as a strategic block to such traffic as well as providing an aesthetic focal point for the Rose Garden.

iii) £750 for a feature for the north end of the Old English Garden, to replace the sundial pedestal which was recently moved to the new grass circle in front of the mansion's port-cochère.

Our chairman Stephen Smith, who is a garden historian, now has the task of finding a suitable urn for the Rose Garden, and an 'arts and crafts' style birdbath/table on a pedestal for the Old English Garden.

All the above costs may amount to more than the Area 7 allocation, in which case we will need to make up the difference from VPC funds. For this reason we are setting up a Restoration Fund, incorporating the existing Plant Fund. If you wish to contribute towards this new fund, which will be spent solely on restoration and planting work in the park, please include a donation with your 2003 subscription and the enclosed renewal slip.

Alternatively, if you wish to contribute specifically towards one or more of the three projects outlined above, please contact our treasurer, Gill Faul, on 01992 814948.

Bats and voles in the park

We were fortunate to enjoy fine weather on the evenings of 26 July and 23 August, when we surveyed the park for the presence of bats. We were guided by Linda Beard of the London Bat Group, who advised us about the various species which have been found in the London area. On the latter date, when we shared the event and refreshments with the Friends of Valentines Mansion, we were pleased to hear the bats' echolocation ultrasounds on our monitors, and to see several Pipistrelles feeding over the Long Canal and other lakes.

We hope to continue with more detailed surveys in the park next summer, when we may also find some Danbentons bats which feed on insects on the surface of water.



Water voles were once common in Redbridge, being often seen along the Roding Valley and at several other sites, including Valentines Park. Environmental groups are now concerned about their status, as in the past 15 years their numbers have plummeted by 90% nationally, and they are in danger of extinction. The main problems are destruction of their waterside habitats, predation by the imported American mink, and being poisoned or shot because they are mistaken for rats.

In early October 2002 a water vole survey team visited the park, and were seen boating on the Fish Pond in order to examine the banks of the island. Sadly, no signs of voles were found, but we hope that plans for enhancements, which are included in the Heritage Lottery Fund bid, will provide the reed beds and marginal plantings along streams and lakes which voles require.

Mink do not venture into the London area, and voles have been successfully reintroduced at the Wetland Centre at Barn Elms, west London, so why not at Valentines? Could we again see Ratty of *Wind in the Willows* here?

Christine Fairfax