

ACTION FORUM

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY FOR RAINHAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

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Rainham's Archaeological Past



The hoardings have been up for some time, but what was found under the land behind?
How far back does the history of Rainham go?
Find out more on p.7

(Photo thanks to Geoff Watkins, Aerial Imaging South East)

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Editorial

According to a recent study, flowers are opening up to a month earlier now than they did in the 1980s. It certainly seems that you see plants in bloom around the area sooner than I recall from years ago, which could well be another sign of climate change. On page 4 you can find out about reducing your carbon footprint with a bulk buy of solar panels opportunity which closes early March.

Hopefully, by the time you read this there will be colourful displays of Spring in parks, verges and gardens to brighten the area. We also have a contribution this month from Leon at 'Wild about Rainham' who writes about the ways we can encourage wildlife in our area.

Lots is going on!

The origins of Rainham go back much further than the recorded history we have available, as has been highlighted by the finds shown on our front cover and outlined on page 7.



Rainham was on the Roman route from Canterbury to London, which followed older tracks. We know of Roman villas in the vicinity at Hartlip, as well as the recently-discovered Roman temple in Newington, but there is now evidence dating back much further. Another site was excavated at Grange Farm, Gillingham back in 2006 but the results have only just been published, showing that

the area was occupied from Stone Age through Bronze and Iron Ages to Roman times with a Roman road linking Watling Street to the River Medway (parallel to the current Ito/Yokosuka Way) as well as a Roman Mausoleum and silver smelting works. It will be fascinating to hear what has been discovered in Rainham when the archaeologists publish their report on the site but it hints at what else must be waiting to be found underneath our houses and gardens!

It has been suggested that the Barclays Bank building may become a café and art studio. If this is the case then it would be great news that the building has a new use so we await developments with interest.

During the lockdown, St Margaret's Church set up a service to help local people keep in touch by starting 'Rainham News' videos, fronted by ex-Meridian reporter Sandy Fleming, with stories from local people and about local events. It has been great to find out what has been going on around Rainham and generate more of a community heart so it's worth checking out their YouTube channel. They are now looking for more stories so if you have any local news please contact them (see p5).

Letters to the Editor

Wigmore Open Gardens???

Dear Editor,

Unfortunately because of the pandemic this very popular biennial event was cancelled in 2021. However, even though the future is still uncertain, it is hoped that it can take place this year if enough residents are willing to open their gardens.

The event is organised by St Matthew's Church and is being planned for the weekend of 2nd & 3rd July 2022. If any residents of Wigmore or South Gillingham would like to consider opening their gardens for part of a day, in support of either the church or for their chosen charity, please could they contact me as soon as possible.

For further information, without any

commitment, email
paul@bellerby.me or leave a message on
01634 387328.
Hopefully the event will be able to provide
some much needed community enjoyment
again to banish the Covid blues.

Yours faithfully,
Paul Bellerby, Gardens Co-ordinator

Elmley Prison

Dear Editor,
For the last 2 and a half years I have been
visiting Elmley Prison on the Isle of Sheppey
in a voluntary role. I am Co-Chair of the
Elmley HMP Independent Monitoring Board
(IMB). We are part of the Ministry of Justice.

IMB members are independent, unpaid and
work an average of 2-3 visits per month.
Their role is to monitor the day-to-day life in
their local prison or removal centre and
ensure that prisoners and detainees are treated
fairly and humanely.

We are currently recruiting volunteers to
work at Elmley. It can be a demanding role
and I was first attracted to the role because
you can choose which days you come in and,
apart from a monthly Board meeting, there
are no set days.

Further information can be found on the IMB
web site www.imb.org.uk. Click on
'Voluntary Opportunities' for more
information.

At Elmley we are a friendly group and would
welcome volunteers from all walks of life but
you must be over 18. If you have any
questions please feel free to email me on
twfc68@gmail.com

John Cunningham
Rainham

Oast and Beer Music Festival

Dear Editor,
The Oast Beer and Music Festival is returning
for 2022 after cancelling the last two years
due to Covid19 restrictions.

The event takes place on the 24th & 25th of
June 2022 at the Oast Community Centre
(next to Rainham Station) and will be raising
funds for the upkeep of the centre.

Although it's listed as a beer festival, we will
also have locally-produced ciders and wines.
The previous events in 2018 & 2019 raised
over £10,000 for the Oast so we look forward
to helping again this year.

If you would like to advertise in the
programme or be a sponsor of the festival to
promote your business please get in touch
via www.oastfestival.co.uk.

Yours faithfully,
Oast Festival Committee

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Climate Conversations

The sun has got its hat on - hip, hip, hip hooray!



As two of our team have already invested in solar panels, a solution that converts the sun's energy directly into electricity for use in your home, I thought it time to find out whether it was right for me. The more so, as 'Solar Together Kent' group-buying scheme launched on February 7th and you have until March 15th to register your interest at www.solartogether.co.uk/medway/home, without any commitment to buy.

Those who have already installed solar panels will tell you that the sun doesn't actually need to be shining to begin generating your own electricity, but the longer it is bright the better. A survey of your roof, typically done remotely via satellite images, including which direction it faces and whether trees are likely to put your panels in the shade, will determine what you can expect to generate and save.

I do appreciate that this is unlikely to be affordable for everyone, as the 8-panel (3 kw) set-up I am investigating has been illustrated (after group purchase benefit) to cost around £3,000. But with energy prices set to increase significantly during 2022, any investment in solar panels will reduce my monthly bills, especially as I can organise our domestic life around the time the sun is shining, e.g. programme the washing machine to operate during good sunlight hours.

Many appear keen to investigate, knowing that they can cut CO² emissions by well over

half a metric tonne per year on average, as Kent is in a good geographical location for solar panels.

The www.energysavingstrust.org.uk calculator I used forecast an annual saving of £276 per year off my electricity bill, so compared to around £15 per year in interest if the same money were in my bank current account, this appears to be a very decent return.

Do let us know your experiences and we will keep you updated on our progress and savings achieved.

The air that we breathe...

On the 13th January, I received an email alert from www.Kentair.org forecasting that Rainham's air quality the following day would reduce to mainly 'Moderate' - caused by atmospheric conditions preventing air pollution dispersing as normal.

The forecast included a health warning particularly for adults and children with pre-existing lung problems and adults with heart problems but also the general population.

The recommendation with this warning was to consider reducing strenuous physical exercise, particularly outdoors.

I posted the forecast and recommendation onto the Rainham Eco-hub Facebook page and will continue to do so if air quality in Rainham is forecast to worsen.

Visit the above website page for more info.

February Monthly Eco Challenge

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Community

Hall Hire Opportunities at St Matthews

St Matthews Church Community Centre in Wigmore is a popular place for occasional and regular group gatherings with excellent facilities for all types of groups. It is especially popular for children's parties on Saturday or Sunday afternoons.

The hall is a community resource and currently twelve groups meet there regularly, but we do have space to welcome more on some mornings or early afternoons.

For information about occasional hire, contact Betty Mitchell on 01634 235507 or by email at aa.mitchell@btinternet.com
For enquiries about regular hire, contact Paul Bellerby at paul@bellerby.me or leave a message on 01634 387328.

Rainham Ladies Choir

We meet each Monday from 7.30pm at Rainham School for Girls (RSG), Derwent Way, Rainham, ME8 0BX

A large rehearsal space with easy access, both the venue and our choir continue to be Covid-aware and risk assessed. New members are always welcome so, if you can sing, and would love to join our long-established and friendly group of ladies, please contact us.

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Rainham News - your local news channel!!

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Investment in Rainham Pupils

I was interested to hear that the Howard School have recently opened a purpose-built Science and DT block, using a £5million investment from the Dept for Education. Within the new block are two new ICT classrooms, a specialist graphics room, an engineering workshop supported by further design and technology classrooms, and a suite of science laboratories.



Both staff and students have very much enjoyed teaching and learning in the new environment, which is part of the school's 5-year strategic plan.

Green Drinks Special - Monday 7th March

We normally meet to share interests and knowledge regarding living more sustainably but this month one of the Green Doctors from 'Groundworks' will be joining us to give a talk, which is also planned to be livestreamed.

Groundwork's Green Doctors help households stay warm, stay well, save money on the household bills and reduce carbon. Our aim is to support the people who most need our support and our staff are as good with people as they are with technical knowhow!

Join us - 7.30pm at the Manor Farm pub

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Saxon Discoveries in Rainham (from p1)

Anyone driving past the Manor Farm pub on the A2 at Rainham may have noticed that 4 bungalows have been demolished to make way for the new Churchill Living retirement complex. However, out of view behind the hoardings advertising the new apartments, some intensive archaeological investigations have been taking place over the last few months, with a team excavating across the site.

When the Premier Inn was built in the Manor Farm car park there were some significant finds made which flagged the area for further studies if other building work was proposed. Finds at that time included items from both the Iron Age and Roman era, as well as a substantial multi-room air raid shelter constructed for the staff of the old gas show-rooms, dating from 1940, which must have been filled in after the war.

In the latest excavations, initial finds from the area closest to Manor Farm were of Iron age saltern hearths - salt production kilns to evaporate sea water to make salt for food preservation - as well as evidence of Iron Age round houses from the post holes left behind. Some Roman pottery fragments were also found but no evidence of Roman buildings.

The most surprising discoveries were located on the opposite side of the site closest to the A2 and underneath what would have been the first bungalow and front garden. Here a series of 10 early Saxon graves,

dating from 1500 years ago, including one of a child were found. Unfortunately, due to the high acidity of the soil, no bones were left but the more resistant enamel in teeth meant some of them survived.

The graves were all laid out on an East-West axis with heads facing west and grave goods such as iron knives, a set of keys and a belt buckle were still present. Most fascinating were the Neolithic arrow heads buried in 3 of the graves. These date from nearly 6000 years ago so it's suggested they must have had some special meaning to be used in much later Saxon burials.

The finds have all been removed from the site for further investigation but will be displayed at a later date.

The name of Rainham has been changed over the years so the older names of Rygingaham and Raegingaham have Anglo-Saxon origins. The people buried here, known as Franks rather than Angles or Saxons, had connections to France and emulated their burial practices. They would have been some of the earliest people to make Rainham their home.

It's an intriguing thought that this area is at the end of Berengrave Lane which historian Freddie Cooper found shown as Burying Grave on a map from 1801 - could that name have older origins?



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Nature Notes (Joe Ennis)

WINTER NATURE NOTES

The winter months are an opportunity to admire the unobstructed, often magnificent, structures of deciduous trees before their leaves reappear in the spring. For me, one delight is to view the trees at the junction of Maidstone Rd and Deanwood Dr as the red, winter sun rises behind them; oak, sweet chestnut, ash, beech and sycamore. I am familiar with these neighbourhood trees, but it is not always easy to identify species in the absence of leaves. For example, beech, lime and ash trees all have a smooth, grey bark. Both beech and sweet chestnut trees have massive lower branches that droop down to the ground. Horse chestnut and ash trees have boughs that sweep out, down then gracefully up again.

However, even in January, there are some still -dormant, deciduous trees that are a sign of spring, other than just an object of admiration. By the end of the month, rooks are spending more time in their treetop rookeries, typically oak, poplar or ash. Their bulky nests of sticks and mud would have deteriorated over winter and the males will have begun to come up from the fields to inspect and tinker with them. Before long, the females will have joined them and it is they who will eventually do most of the building work. If a pair uses an old nest again, it will probably be just a convenient base, on top of which they will construct a new one. However, most pairs construct a completely new nest close to the old one, pulling out the best of last year's sticks to use as fresh building material. It becomes very noisy in the rookery as the new nest-building gets under way, with rooks cawing furiously as sticks are stolen. Before the end of March, there will be sturdy nests dotted all over the rookery. By April, the females will be in their nests, sitting on eggs. There are rookeries in a line of poplar trees that cross over the A2 towards Newington, a short distance beyond the Rainham boundary; in oak trees at Keycol Hill on the A2 just before the A249 roundabout and in ash trees overlooking the A249 near Stockbury Church.

I now turn to late winter activity in nearby Bredhurst Wood, managed by Bredhurst Woodland Action Group. Male grey squirrels may be seen chasing females through the trees, sometimes with several in pursuit of a single female, while the dominant male fights off his rivals. The squirrels wave their bushy tails furiously as they chase through the branches, often leaping from tree to tree and chattering as they go. Jays can sometimes be spotted searching for the acorns and sweet chestnuts they buried in the woodland floor in autumn. They are apparently adept at remembering the whereabouts of their stored nuts. They are the shyest species of the crow family but can attract attention to themselves by their harsh, grating screeches. Recognised by their greyish-pink body and white, striking rump, as they fly off through the trees, they can often be seen in large, secretive, suburban gardens. Great spotted woodpeckers can also sometimes be surprised as they probe for larvae in the rotten wood of dead trees. Residents with gardens backing on to East Hoath Wood will be the ones most likely to see a great spotted woodpecker at their bird feeder.

Cock pheasants may be seen walking slowly and boldly over dead leaves on the wood floor, turning the leaves over noisily as they look for worms, slugs, spiders or beetles. At the same time, they are selecting their spring territory as they stalk about with their habitual, proud demeanour. Despite their long residence in this country, having been introduced by the Normans, some bird watchers refuse to consider them a native British bird, as so many are reared by gamekeepers but according to the late Dr Oliver Rackham, a one-time Cambridge University botanist, no bird has had a greater impact on the English landscape than the pheasant and only the red grouse has had anything like the same level of influence. It was with rise of the Victorian landed classes,

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from the mid- 19th century, that pheasant shooting became a part of their social calendar. Rackham took the view that pheasants filled a vacuum which the decline of woodsmanship was leaving and gamekeepers kept alive many disused woods that might have been grubbed out. In particular some coppicing was continued, which was beneficial to certain woodland birds and flowers. Yet Rackham also argued that game-keeping corrupted country life and produced ill-feeling between landowners and other folk. Gamekeepers took it upon themselves to persecute birds of prey and to exclude the public from ancient woods harbouring pheasants that had hitherto been everyone's heritage.

It's that time of the year...

(Leon Roskilly - Wild About Rainham)

When you walk into the garden and the urge to get mulching, sowing and digging tries to spur you into action, every time the sun shines, or it feels just a little warmer.

Immediately my eye is drawn to the dead growth still standing from last year's growth and the urge to start clearing it away, and prune back the salvias and other plants becomes almost irresistible.

But there's a reason it has been left like that when so many nearby gardens have been 'tidied' since late summer.

There is a lot of ripe seed heads that have provided vital winter food for goldfinches and sparrows, as well as the insects that climb amongst the dead stems.

And that dead growth has provided protection for overwintering insects vital to the health of my garden.

Slug-munching beetles, aphid-munching

earwigs, lace wings, ladybirds and a number of other creatures that help to maintain a healthy garden when the new growth starts to show.

So, with the real prospect of other cold spells yet to come, I'll resist those urges for a while yet and let it be. Those creatures can stay snug and warm until it really is time to clear it away.

Then I'll carefully stack the dead stalks vertically in my brush pile at the back of the rear garden so that they can continue to provide shelter and food until rotting away, to eventually be replaced by next season's cleared plants, while inviting hedgehogs, robins, wrens to set up home in the pile.

Once the flowerbeds have been cleared, it will be a case of mulching the ground several inches deep from the home made compost in the bins to put back the nutrients next year's pollinator-friendly shrubs and plants will need to produce wonderful colours and summer scents, and even more fascinating wildlife amongst the growing leaves and flowers...

Kent Wildlife Trust Zoom Workshops



Our Zoom workshops have been so popular that we are repeating some of them, so if you missed out the first time, please try again at:

www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/wilder-gardens

7th Mar - 'Wilder Lawns' 7.30-9pm

26th Mar - 'Weeds & Wildflowers in the traditional garden to attract pollinators' 11-12.30pm

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First Rainham Youth Sunday League Football Champions

(by David Wood)

Young, talented and successful, Rainham Youth Football Club became the first Rainham champions of the Medway Minor League in 1967/1968.

The league only operated as one division at under 18 level compared with the vast range of divisions and age ranges that exist today.

Playing at Rainham Recreation Ground on Sunday mornings in a strip of white shirts, black shorts and white socks, the team had considerable local support with big crowds attending home matches. Going through the entire season undefeated in the league, the team only dropped one point in a 2-2 draw with Upchurch United early in the season but were able to hold off a strong challenge from these local opponents until they met again in the final league match.

The Rainham youngsters outplayed Upchurch in this game to win 4-1 and secure the championship. This avenged a 3-0 defeat Upchurch had inflicted on the Rainham youngsters earlier in the League Cup.

Rainham Youth also did well against the men in the Medway Sunday League Cup by defeating Division 1 side, Woodfield, 6-0 in the second round although they were then eliminated by premier division team, Strand Athletic, 6-3 in a hard-fought third round match.

They also did well in the Kent Minor Cup

until defeated by Gravesend team, Riverside, on a very small pitch in the quarter finals.

Upchurch United went on to win the Kent Minor and League Cups as these two local teams totally dominated boy's football in the area.

Rainham had an array of talented players, including Graham Knight who later played for Gillingham Football Club. He played most of his career for Gillingham, making 274 first team appearances and scoring 10 goals as a full back from 1968 to 1979. Dave Pullen and John Higginson of Rainham Youth also played with him for Gillingham Youth.

David Wood played in goal for Rainham Youth, whilst defenders included Graham Smith, Brian Puplett and Trevor Moore. Midfield was comprised of Brian Perkins, Graham Knight and John Higginson, whilst forwards included Terry Arnold, Ray Heath, Dave Pullen, Jack Barlow, Dave Whitehead and Chris Tong.

Several people helped organise the team, including Len Harrison of Station Road.

Geoff Stone, Denis Chambers, Les Woolley, Mick Arnold, Martin Cogger, Andy Findlay and Paul Clark later performed for the team at the senior level in the League.

Most of the original team re-formed during the mid-1970s to become Rainham Social Club FC and they were also successful in the Medway Sunday League.

Those were the days!

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Dates for the Diary

Request an entry in the diary (free of charge) contact: diary@actionforum.co.uk

4th Mar - Upchurch Choral Society - 8pm at St Mary's, Upchurch. Contact suerossiter@waitrose.com or 01634 234780 (also 11/18/25)

5th Mar - High Powered QRO setup Contest
Contact ian@dr.com for details

6th Mar - Capstone Volunteer Conservation Day
10am - 2pm, booking essential. Call 01634 338191

7th Mar - Rainham Ladies Choir, 7.30pm Rainham School for Girls, Contact 01634 262214 (also 14/21/28)

7th Mar - Green Drinks (environmental networking)
Manor Farm 7.30pm, therainhamecohub@gmail.com

8th Mar - Bredhurst Whist Club, 7.30pm, Bredhurst Village Hall. Contact Chris (eve) 07707 669915 (also 15/22/29)

9th Mar - East Medway u3a at Smallholders Club, ring 07816 159668 or visit www.u3asites.org.uk/east-medway

12th Mar - 1-day Paediatric First Aid, 10.30am-4.30pm, Bredhurst, £40pp, contact office@the139club.co.uk

14th Mar - Medway Organ and Keyboard Club
50th Anniversary Concerts, 7pm for 7.30pm start, 2nd Monday of each month at Parkwood Community Centre. Our concerts feature professional organists playing easy listening music. Visitors welcome - £7 per person. For more details, contact phil.burt@ntlworld.com

16th Mar - Wigmore Ladies - 2pm Howard Memorial Hall - 01634 388912

17th Mar - WI, 1.45-4pm, Rainham Cricket Club, Berengrave Lane, Contact Lynne: 01634 23499

17th Mar - 'All things sloe gin and chocolate' Bring and Buy Sale, 1.45pm, Howard Memorial Hall, contact 07791 781910

19th Mar - Coffee Morning/Cake Sale at Hempstead Scout HQ for '20th Gillingham Air Scouts' and 'Making Miracles', cake donations welcome, 10am-1pm

19th Mar - Holy Trinity Quiz , 7.30pm, 01634 923991

23rd Mar - Rainham Historical Society talk on 'City of Canterbury' 7.30pm Millenium Centre, 01634 389919

25th Mar - Charity Bring and Buy/Cake Sale, Bredhurst Village Hall, 9.30-11.30am

25th Mar - Medway Geographical Society on 'Ukraine and Mexico', 2pm Twydall Church Hall

25th Mar - Inner Wheel Club charity quiz night/fish and chip supper at Upchurch River Valley restaurant, £12pp, tables of 6/8, contact 07547 250010

27th Mar - 'Signs of Spring' at Capstone, booking essential - contact 01634 338191

27th Mar - Riverside Volunteer Conservation Day
10am - 2pm, booking is essential. Call 01634 337432

27th Mar - Rainham Community Litter Pick - collect rubbish near you, take a photo and post on the Rainham Litter Heroes Facebook Page.

Check out the www.thenet.uk.net/events for up-to-the-minute events.

Word on the Streets

There are always a few volunteer vacancies, some temporary and some permanent due to the ever-expanding nature of Rainham's housing.

Anne currently has volunteers for all the roads we deliver to (a huge thank you to all who got in touch) but if you can help out in emergencies or during holidays she would still love to hear from you - **07791 585 998**

Additionally, if you are a volunteer distributor we would enjoy hearing about your experiences walking your route, the reasons you chose to volunteer etc.

Tell us your story by emailing the editorial team - editor@actionforum.co.uk

Urgent

Action Forum needs volunteer help at its distribution hub. This ensures copies get to our volunteer distribution team on time.

If you can help, call Anne on 07791 585 998 to find out more.



Capstone Country Park Events:

6th March - Volunteer Conservation Task Day
10am - 2pm

27th March - Signs of Spring 10am -12pm

Booking is essential - contact 01634 338191



Riverside Country Park Event:

27th March - Volunteer Conservation Task Day
10am -2pm

Booking is essential - contact 01634 337432

Profits from Action Forum are always distributed between a number of charities. More recent recipients have been St Margaret's, St Matthews, as well as Tools with A Mission.

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