# AGTON FORUM

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY FOR RAINHAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

JAN 2024

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# Flying Ace Buried in Rainham Churchyard



Sgt Harold Howes was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal for his actions in 1940 but was, sadly, killed when his plane crashed in Cuxton, returning home.

Read the full story of this war hero on p11.

(photo courtesy of Philip Cole and the Battle of Britian Society)





Next issue: Feb 22nd, 2024 Copy date: Feb 12th, 2024

Please contact us by email to the appropriate address and include your telephone number so

we can call you if needed. Editor@actionforum.co.uk Diary@actionforum.co.uk Distribution 07791 858 998

Adverts@actionforum.co.uk Prices on page 14 Postal address: 5 Meresborough Farm Cottages Meresborough, Gillingham, Kent. ME8 8PP

# **Editorial**

Happy New Year to all our readers! We hope you had an enjoyable break over the festive period.

It was lovely to see the lights in Rainham this year, having heard to the contrary. There were also some impressive Christmas displays around the area - a bit more spread out from the days it was mainly Grain Road! The Harry Potter display on Wigmore Road was a real highlight (featured on BBC SouthEast news). The effort and attention was amazing. In total, their displays across Easter, Hallowe'en and Christmas have raised an incredible £4745 for 'My Shining Star'!

Alan Stockey provides a Red Route proposal update on p12 although the consultation doesn't appear to have been well planned. If you have views, one way or another, it's important to let the council know.

While walking through Cozenton Park over the break, I noticed the new Splashes building is making good progress, with the outside nearing completion. The project is scheduled to be ready by summer and having a local pool again will be welcome news for the holidays.

The Picture Books of Old Rainham were selling well as gifts but there are still copies available if you would like to buy any. All proceeds go towards St Margaret's Church.

Not featured in the books are the photos on our cover and p11, highlighting the sacrifices made in the Second World War; a reminder of those locally who were awarded medals for their bravery. If you have any photos or stories of your family, we always love to see them.

# Letters to the Editor

# **Orchard Street School photos**

Hello,

I emailed you recently about the photo on the front of AF with a group of girls, holding pet rabbits, of which my mother Doris York was

I have found another, similar era, same place, this is of a smaller group of girls in the quad, but on the back is a list of names.

It's a postcard format, the address on the back is to V Hutchinson in Sittingbourne and the other named girls are:

Hilda Bigg, Celia Partridge, Noreen Beams, Doris York, Pat Jones.

If anyone recognises their names, I would be happy to make copies for them

Hazel Thorn

# Take to the floor - Rainham Tea Dances

Dear Editor,

If your readers have been inspired by Strictly Come Dancing on TV, come and join our friendly tea dance group.

We meet on a Friday afternoon, 2-4pm at the United Services Club in Rainham. It costs £1 with tea & biscuits included (plus £1 visitor fee, if not a member of USC).

We dance mainly sequence, some ballroom and occasional line dance. We also learn new dances, recap old ones, and will help all to pick them up in a relaxed informal way.

All will be made welcome and no judging will take place!

Further info from Jane or Gary 01634 374938

# Joe Ennis Tour of Old Rainham

Dear Editor,

There is a fabulous collection of photos of old Rainham from a slide show given by Joe Ennis in 2006 on You Tube that may interest your readers.

"Tour of Old Rainham - Sept 2006"

www.rainham-history.co.uk/ennis

# Re: June letter from Michael Croucher

Dear Editor

I would be grateful if you could put this in your Action Forum.

My brother Roger sent me editions of AF and in one, dated June 2023, I got a surprise. There is a letter sent from Michael Croucher.

When I was 5 years old, I attended the Camp School in Maidstone Road, Rainham, and lived in a prefab in Dobson Avenue, Maidstone Road.

On the first day of school, I became friends with a Michael Croucher, up to attending the Orchard Street Boys Secondary School. I used to go to his house where his parents made me very welcome.

I was wondering if this is the Michael Croucher I knew and if he wanted to get in touch with me.

Kind regards, Michael Whitehead (number can be supplied from Action Forum)

#### Rainham's George Meegan

Dear friends at Action Forum, I think many readers of Action Forum, and certainly his many friends in Rainham, will have heard of George Meegan, one of Rainham's most famous residents.

I first met George during my last year of junior school at Wakeley Road, 1962. I joined for that last year as my parents had

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George led a fantastically varied life, too incredible to give details here, but people who know will know!

He was most famous for walking the length of America, documented in his book, 'The Longest Walk'. He married Yoshiko during this walk and had two children Ayumi and Geoffrey, eventually settling in Japan where he taught English. Unfortunately, his marriage didn't work out and he returned home to Taswell Road until poor health led him to Marlborough House in Rainham four years ago. His health continued to deteriorate and, following a stroke and fall early this year, is in a residential home in Burnley, near Ayumi and his grandchildren, who visit regularly. Sadly, George barely recognises family or friends although, when I spoke to him in the summer, he said immediately where I lived so some recognition is there.

I thought George's many Rainham friends would like to be informed and I have his address if anyone wishes to write. Email *alan.crowder@blueyonder.co.uk*, telling me how you know George, and I will give you the home's address.

Regards, Alan Crowder



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# **Community**

# **Indoor Boot Fair**

Saturday 20th January 2 - 4pm

St Matthews Community Centre, Drewery Drive ME8 0NX (behind church).

Readers are welcome to come and bag some boot fair bargains and all in the warm too! Refreshments and homemade cakes will also be available to buy.

Entry is 50p for adults, free for children.

Contact Paul Bellerby on 07960 589815 for information if needed.

#### Can you help Upchurch Choral Society?

We are without a Conductor/Music Director and require a new one as soon as possible.

A friendly SATB choir of about 34 members with mixed musical abilities, the choir was formed over 50 years ago and has grown from a small village choral group to the Society we are today.

We would like to increase membership and musical standards, sing varied repertoire and develop generally, performing two or three concerts every year using a variety of choral music.

Rehearsals are every Friday (7.45-9.15pm) in St Mary's in Upchurch. The church has an organ, an electric piano and we have an excellent Accompanist.

If interested, please contact: S E Rossiter, 114 Chaffes Lane, Upchurch, ME9 7BH, or <u>sue.rossiter1@outlook.com</u>

Applications close: 31st January 2024.

# **Bredhurst Woodland Action Group**

After a brief break over Christmas, we are now back, as busy as ever!

On 17th Jan you can join us for our club night presentation - this month the topic is 'Insects; Lifecycles and Lifestyles', with Mike Chittenden

We meet at Blacksmith's Barn, Bredhurst, ME7 3JU at 19.30. £5 on the door includes refreshments.

BWAG meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of each month for Club Night presentations, with various speakers.

We also convene the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of each month for woodland task days, meeting at the allotments, Hurstwood Rd. Bredhurst, ME7 3JZ at 09.45.

All volunteers are welcome and lunch and refreshments are provided.

The first task day of 2024 is 21st Jan.

For any details call 07772 920359 or check out FaceBook & <u>info@bwag.org.UK</u>

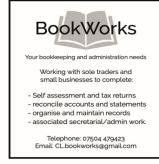
# **Quiz in aid of Kent, Surrey & Sussex Air Ambulance**

The Inner Wheel Club of Gillingham are holding a Quiz & Fish and Chip Supper Upchurch River Valley Restaurant, Oak Lane Upchurch

# Friday March 15th at 6.30pm

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# Community cont...

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# Rainham WI

3rd Thursday of each month (starting 24th), Rainham Cricket Club, Berengrave Lane, 1.15 - 4pm.

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# Word on the Streets

We need volunteer deliverers for:

#### Rainham

top of Otterham Quay Lane/ Bramley Cl/ Blackthorn Rd (50), Langdale Cl (105), Salisbury Ave/Lyra Cl (86) Beacon Cl/Balmer Cl (36) Pump Lane - Begonia Ave to railway bridge (112)

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Sickness/holiday cover for all areas is required too.

If you are interested in helping out - even just temporarily, please do get in touch with Anne: 07791 585998

# Medway Repair Café launch date

There is now an official date for the start of this new and exciting project:

Saturday 20th Jan, from 10.30am - 1pm On this occasion the café will be hosted by Strood Library but the café will then rotate between Strood and Chatham.

Watch out for the posters going up in all our libraries and put the dates below into your new diaries!

Strood Jan 20th
Chatham 17th Feb
Strood March 16th
Chatham April 27th
Strood May 25th
Chatham June 22<sup>nd</sup>

It will be interesting to see how this new scheme develops and we wish its organisers all the best as they move forward.

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# Nature Notes

# <u>Happy New Year in the Wildlife Friendly</u> Garden

I have had a difficult couple of months in the garden, so am playing 'catch-up'. I have found the short dark days very depressing, so jobs I usually take pleasure from doing have become very difficult to accomplish. But life is about trying again, so I am making an effort, over the next couple of months, to achieve my objectives of having a beautiful garden full of wildlife in 2024.

However, on a more positive note, plants such as snowdrops, viburnum and witch hazel are beginning to bloom. They brighten up every day!



# Plant of the month

Most of us will have received house plants as presents this year. These are often chosen for their flower at Christmas so, find out whether they are something that will last for many seasons then treat them according to their needs.

Most things benefit from a weekly soak with a few drops of house plant food in the water, followed by a good drain.

It is difficult to give general advice but, from my experience, the best things for them are light, lack of draughts, not too much heat and a regular care regime. This will ensure long life and healthy plants. I managed to revive my Christmas cacti in this way, although one is late coming into flower.

#### Job of the month

Over the Christmas holidays, I made time to write up my gardening plans and have one major outcome for each month and the weekly steps needed to make those things happen.

So, for January, the plan is to prepare the ponds for the frog-breeding season with four steps:

- remove dead foliage and replant baskets where needed,
- clean up duckweed,
- weed the beds bordering the ponds,
- plant cover for froglets and renew their shelter.

Over February, I will then turn my attention to the borders.

Keep taking photographs, especially of your failures! I have spent a lot of time looking back, so I can improve the range of plants in the garden.

Off now to do some wild flower seed sowing! I have some white clover and meadow vetchling to add to the grass this year.

Follow our upcoming activities at: www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/whats-on

Happy wildlife friendly gardening in 2024,

Victoria Golding, (Kent Wildlife Trust Garden Advisor)

P.S. Wonderful news about our new baby bison at the Blean!



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# New Year, New Habits?

As we start a new year, I would like to discuss the subject of the excessive numbers of Magpies, particularly around the area of Maidstone Road/Highfields Road. I am no novice in matters concerning wildlife, having been brought up in the countryside. I understand how important the balance of nature is and enjoy nothing more than witnessing Sparrowhawks, Peregrines and, now even Red Kites, behaving naturally and doing their bit in keeping things at a good balance. In the right numbers, even Magpies play their part.

However, I have noticed that certain residents appear to be feeding and encouraging the tamer magpies and, as a result, we are now inundated with them. As such, they mob and bully every other bird in the area; even carrion crows are not safe.

On one occasion we watched mobs of magpies harassing a crow around the nest she built high up in the trees.

Over the past year, we witnessed newlyfledged sparrow chicks being taken from a neighbour's feeding table, a blackbird dustbathing in our garden attacked from bushes above whilst nests in our bushes have been ransacked.

The problem has become so bad that, apart from the odd woodpigeon, all have deserted us. As a result, we have no, and I mean no,

garden song birds in our garden at all - no more sparrows, wrens, robins, goldcrests, blackbirds etc.

Neighbours have stopped putting up fatballs or other food and treats out as the magpies just swoop in and ransack everything.

A friend, helplessly, witnessed the nest of a turtle dove being ransacked.

Last spring, I even resorted to pulling out a popular bush in which blackbirds and other birds usually nest, to deter them nesting and us having to witness the subsequent slaughter of eggs and chicks.

I know people are feeding them as I can see the birds flocking to particular gardens from my upper windows.

Again, I repeat - I do understand nature's way but, please, can people stop encouraging these magpies. They are not doing our area any favours and, as a consequence, magpie numbers are out of control in this area.

Many thanks, Ross Elliott local Rainham resident



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# Rainham History (Philip Cole)

# Rainham WW2 Pilot

Sgt Harold Norman Howes 740896 was born in Gillingham, Kent on 24th Dec 1915.

He joined the RAFVR about Dec 1937 as an Airman u/t Pilot and was called up on 1st Sept 1939. He joined 213 Squadron, coded AK, on 7th Sept and was serving with 85 Squadron in France in May, 1940.



On the 20th May, he damaged a Do17 of

KG77 (4)? but was then shot down in Hurricane P2555 by Me110's and crash-landed near Abbeville. He was unhurt and the Hurricane abandoned.

On 18th Aug 1940, he destroyed two Mel 10's and damaged a Do17, on the 31st got a probable Do17 and on 1st Sept he shared another Do17 and damaged a Me109. Posted to 605 Squadron, coded UP, at Croydon on 12th Sept, Howes destroyed a Do17 (and probably another on the 15th), destroyed a Me109 on 12th Oct, damaged Me109's on 1st and 2nd Nov and destroyed two more on the 10th and 15th.

He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal (gazetted 25th October 1940). The citation read:

'During the period of intensive operations in France, Sergeant Howes destroyed four

'enemy aircraft. In August, 1940, he took part in attacks against large enemy formations. He personally destroyed two Messerschmitt 110s and one Dornier 17, and severely damaged several others. Sergeant Howes has proved himself a brave and determined pilot.

Howes was shot down by a Me109 on 1st Dec in Hurricane V6844 and made a crashlanding on Gravesend Aerodrome. He was unhurt and the Hurricane later repaired. He was posted back to 85 Squadron, coded VY, on 9th Dec 1940, the squadron now night-flying in Hurricanes from RAF Gravesend.

Howes took off for a routine night patrol at 17.15hrs on the night of the 22nd but was recalled when the weather began to deteriorate. He crashed at Cuxton, Kent and was killed, apparently losing control of Hurricane I V6679, perhaps due to icing. He was just 24. Buried in St Margaret's

churchyard, Rainham, it appears his mother, Louisa Howes, was later buried with him, in 1969.

I have maintained the gravesite on behalf of the Battle of Britain Society for years and often wonder if any extended family are still in the area. unaware of this hero.

(Thanks to Battle of Britain Society and Rainham History)



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# Climate Conversations

# <u>**Bah Humbug and Red Routes**</u> (Alan Stockey)

Whether you are for or against the proposed Red Route for Rainham High Street, you should be very disappointed by Medway Council's failure to deliver the recent Statutory Consultation according to either its own published guidelines, or the legally required Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.

It failed on so many counts and appeared to be made as difficult as possible for members of public to engage, it is difficult to see how they can move on without needing to repeat the Statutory Consultation:

- 1. Failure to make available the particulars of the proposal at a place accessible to members of the public during the published office hours (Gun Wharf has been closed to the public since 31st October 2023, due to RAAC making the structure potentially unsafe).
- 2. Failure to provide the latest design documents (including the incredulous loading bay outside the Nationwide Building Society),
- 3. Failure to spot that documents for Rainham, Chatham and Rochester retained references to Luton Borough Council (Bedfordshire).

It is difficult to know what will happen next, but my recommendation would be a Public Enquiry to ensure all aspects of the design of this proposed scheme and procedures being followed are given appropriate independent scrutiny.

# New Year, New Options It is a new year and with i

It is a new year and with it often new resolutions. For some, those resolutions might be to become a little bit greener. It may take many forms - options are endless!

As a family of five, we have managed to condense our black sack to one per month. Last year, we began to take all soft plastics to our local supermarket. It hasn't been onerous but has made a difference. The big one was trialling a milkman. This has been more expensive, so is definitely not for everyone, but our milk, juice, yoghurt and cream glass are all now returned, along with dried goods containers for things like pasta and cereal. The females in our family have moved to alternative sanitary products and we have tested some of the wide range of eco-toiletries on the market.

But I found this recipe which I have yet to try

out and wondered whether any of you would be brave enough!

# Make your own Washing Up Liquid

- 1) Pick a small basketful of dark green English Ivy leaves.
- 2) Rinse well under a running tap.
- 3) Add to a pan of cold water, bring to the boil and simmer for 20 mins.
- 4) Leave the contents to steep for 24 hours.
- 5) Pick the leaves out of the water, squeeze the liquid from them before discarding, and pour the water into a measuring jug.
- 6) In the jug, mix 1tbsp of soda crystals with 500 ml of the ivy water, stir and decant into a re-useable soap dispenser.
- 7) Use as needed.

If anybody has the courage to give this a go get in touch and let us know what you think!!

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# Dates for the Diary

# Request an entry in the diary (free of charge) Hempstead Players community theatre group, 18+, contact: diary@actionforum.co.uk

12th Jan onwards - Rainham Oasthouse Family Panto 'Mother Goose', Stratford Lane, tickets at 03336 663366/ www.oasthousetheatre.co.uk

8th Jan - 'Green Drinks, 7pm, Manor Farm

8th Jan - Medway Music Club with Michael Wooldridge, Parkwood Community Centre, 7.30pm, refreshments/bar, £7, phil.burt@ntlworld.com or 07795 576294

16th Jan - RSPB Medway, 'Wildlife of Bredhurst', Bob Knight, Parkwood Community Centre, ME8 9PN, 7pm, £4.50, www.facebook.com/rspbmedway/

17th Jan - BWAG Club Night, 'Insects; Lifecycles and Lifestyles' with Mike Chittenden, Blacksmith's Barn, Bredhurst, ME7 3JU, 7.30pm, £5, Call 07772 920359/ Facebook/info@bwag.org.UK

20th Jan - Medway Repair Café, Strood Lib, 10.30am

20th Jan - Indoor Boot Fair, 2-4pm, St Matthews Community Centre, Wigmore, ME8 0NX.

Call 07772 920359/ Facebook/info@bwag.org.UK

21st Jan - BWAG Woodland Task Day, meet at allotments, Hurstwood Rd. Bredhurst, ME7 3JZ, 9.45am, Volunteers welcome. Lunch and refreshments included,

23rd Jan - Friends of St Margaret's Tuesday Social with Brian Killick from Guide Dogs for the Blind, 7.30pm, Memorial Hall, £4 incl refreshments and raffle. For more information call Liz 01795 842272

24th Jan - 'The Train that Jumped the Gap' by Richard Emmett, Rainham Historical Society talk, 7.30pm, Millenium Centre, £3, 01634 263622

26th Jan - 'By ship to Ascension Island & St. Helena' with Alan Mills, Medway Geographical and Local History Soc, Twydall Church, Twydall Lane, 2pm. Annual membership £20, visitors £3.50 per meeting Lorna Bailey on 572139 or Vanda Woollett on 389916

5th Feb - Green Drinks, 7pm, Manor Farm

6th Feb - RSPB Medway Zoom Talk, 'Japan - The World's Best Winter Birding' by James Lowen, £3 pp, 7.15 pm https://group.rspb.org.uk/medway/

9th Feb - The European Southern Observatory by Peter Grimley, Mid-Kent Astronomical Soc, Bredhurst Village Hall, 8pm, www.midkentastro.org.uk

14th Feb - East Medway u3a 'Water, Food Security and Science', 2pm, Wigmore Smallholders' Club, ME8 0JG, Members free, Guests £3, sueu3acook@outlook.com

17th Feb - Medway Repair Café, Chatham Lib, 10.30am

 $\bf 20th~Feb$  - RSPB Medway, 'Red, Green & Spotted All Over' by Kevin Thornton, Parkwood Community Centre, ME8 9PN, 7pm, £4.50, www.facebook.com/rspbmedway/

23rd Feb - 'The Thames Sailing Barge' by John Rayment, Medway Geographical and Local History Soc, Twydall Church, Twydall Lane, 2pm.

Lorna Bailey on 572139 or Vanda Woollett on 389916

24th Feb - The Friends of St Margaret's Church, Rainham Quiz Night, 7pm, £5pp, Millennium Centre, Booking essential 379796/230183. BYO food and drink.

# Check out www.thenet.uk.net/events

07421 817158/thehempsteadplayers.co.uk

St Margaret's Monday 'Relaxed' Service, 4th Mon of month, 2pm, Contact 362 023 for more details

Rainham WI, 3rd Thurs of month, Rainham Cricket Club, 1.15pm, small charge, 01634 234997

Rainham Health Walk, alternate Weds, 10.40am St Margaret's, followed by an active and wellbeing session inside at 12pm, walking@medway.org.uk

Evergreen Club, each Wed, 2pm, Bredhurst Village Hall, Rita on 07748 058770

Kent Classic & Sports Car Club, 2nd Thurs of

Three Mariners, Lower Rainham, 01634 362612

Rainham & District Dollshouse & Miniaturist Group, last Thurs of month, 7.30pm, Howard Hall, Wigmore, 01634 264295 or rainhamdhkent@gmail.com

Lower Halstow short mat bowls, each Mon 2-4, Wed 7.30-9.30, <u>glenyslovell@hotmail.com/</u>01795 842376

**Knit and Natter**, every Tues, 12-2pm, Rainham Mark Social Club, ME8 6YX, bring your craft, come and chat

Hempstead Valley Short Mat Bowls Club, contact Joy on 01622 693101

Upchurch Horticultural Society, 1st Wed each month, 97 Chaffes Lane, contact: upchurchsociety@gmail.com

Rainham Community Choir, every Mon 7pm, Rainham Oast, £4.50, contact cdlmedway@gmail.com

Reflex Photographic Club, Thurs, 7.45pm, Rainham School for Girls, www.reflexphoto.co.uk

Rainham Bereavement Friendship Group, Fri AM, Julie on 01634 364309

Breathe Easy Medway (for those with COPD), 1st Tues of month, 1-3pm, Twydall Community Centre, ME8 6TO

secretary@BreatheEasyMedway.co.uk or 07775 461573

Scottish Country Dancing, Mon - 1.30pm, Bredhurst Village Hall, Thurs - 8pm, St Thomas of Canterbury, Rainham, www.medwaycaledonians.co.uk, £3

Crafty Friends 6.30pm, every Mon, Rainham Oast Community Centre, contact wilsons2@aol.com

Rainham Chess Club, 2nd and 4th Wed of each month, 7.30pm, Rainham Oast, Rob - 07890 938544

Rainham Horticultural Society, 1st Tues each month, 7.15pm, Rainham Cricket Club, 07931 337310 rainham.kent.horticultural@gmail.com

Hempstead Friendship Club for ladies, every 2nd /4th Thurs, behind Hempstead Library, 2pm, 07951 629444

Wigmore Ladies Club, 3rd Wed of month, 2pm, Howard Memorial Hall, 01634 388912

Rainham Flower Club, 3rd Wed of month, Bredhurst Village Hall, 7.30pm, 01634 307855/01795 843180

Profits from Action Forum are distributed between a number of charities.

# Small Ads

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#### PRICE INCREASE for adverts in AF

These prices will apply to renewals and new ads from the March edition. There is no increase for line ads. As new houses are built the number of copies of AF distributed each month has increased to almost 21.000.

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# 9th, 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> February

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