

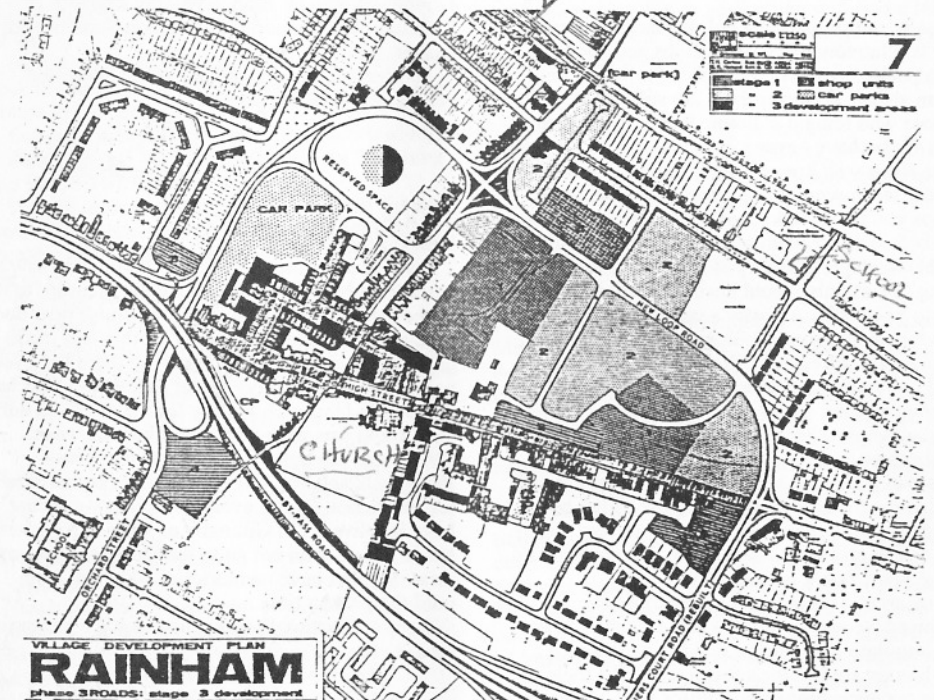
ACTION FORUM

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY FOR RESIDENTS OF RAINHAM AND WIGMORE

AUGUST 1995

■ NUMBER 292

Rainham of the future 1965



The definitive plan for Rainham drawn up by a team of consultants appointed by Gillingham Council in 1965. See the article 'The Rainham Plan - 30 Years On' by Freddie Cooper on page 8.

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AF

Next Issue: September 2nd 1995
Copy Date: August 15th Sm Ads Aug 20
Editorial: Mrs Barbara Mackay Miller,
5 Meresborough Cotts, Tel: 231307.
Advertising: Hamish Mackay Miller,
5 Meresborough Cotts, Tel: 231307.
Letterbox Leaflet Distribution
Medway 376803

Editorial

August is traditionally the holiday month so our Diary is relatively brief. Most clubs and societies have a pause to rebuild their strength for the long autumn ahead. However there are still things to do for those who remain at home. Primarily there are walks, if you have never joined a group why not give it a go. Even well known routes can become almost like new when seen through someone else's eyes. Perhaps you have walked past some landmark many times before not realising its significance. Could you find the Borough boundary stones and give them a beating? I certainly would have to be shown them in order to be certain. Anyway a variety of venues for walks this month from Cobham and Meopham to Lynsted, or just locally at Bredhurst - take your pick. Fund raising activities never cease and during the summer many groups take advantage of the sunny, warm weather to hold garden parties. August 12th sees two such events, one in aid of the Macmillan Nurse for Medway Hospital appeal and the other for the new Demelza House Children's Hospice to be built at Newington. Both very worth while causes so if you are at home that weekend do try to support one if not both!

Many areas of Rainham and District have recognised Neighbourhood Watch schemes. These come into their own during this period when so many houses are left for a fortnight whilst their owners are away enjoying pastures new. However, it is just as effective to operate your own minor scheme with other households in your immediate vicinity. All it needs is a watchful ear and eye, be aware of that unusual sound, a car perhaps stopping in a quiet cul de sac in the middle of the afternoon, just by showing a presence this could be enough to deter the casual thief just looking for easy pickings but anything really suspicious should be reported to the police, who are just as anxious as everyone else to prevent crime so no one has the unhappy experience of returning from holiday to a ransacked home.

If you are interested in tracing your family history make a note of September 16th in your diary as an interesting Open Day is to be organised by the Kent Family History Society for the first time in the Medway Towns. They will be at St George's Centre at Chatham Maritime with many varied displays and

the opportunity to do some research using microfiche that will be available.

Enjoy yourself this month, whether at home or away, and have a rest before the hectic social whirl starts again in September! Have a good time, see you in a month.

Correspondence

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

Dear Editor,

Further to 'Did We Fail Them', the Royal British Legion Gillingham Branch will lay a wreath at Rainham War Memorial at 11am on Sunday 13th August.

Perhaps Mr Cooper and any other interested people would like to attend.

Yours
Mr E.M. Coffey
Branch Secretary

TUDOR GATE

Dear Editor,

I was reading the June Action Forum and saw a letter from Mr Kitney. It was a great pleasure to read of the Tudor Café. We lived in the house next door to it, and the owner invited my mother and me to have a look over the café. We lived there for a few years then moved to Ivy Street as the house became damp. The Upchurch Pottery took it over and our front room was where the potter had his wheel. Mr Kitney was quite correct in saying it was Broadwalk and not Moor Street. My brother sends me the Action Forum every month, as we do not have it delivered in Gillingham. I live in a sheltered house now and do not go to Rainham owing to my disability, but have memories of Rainham from 1914 until the present time.

Keep the Action Forum going as it's a pleasure to read.

Yours truly
Molly Chapman
16 Woodchurch House
Gillingham ME8 6XN

NATURE RESERVE BOG GARDEN

Dear Editor,

I help to manage a nature reserve at St Margaret's Junior and Infants Schools in Orchard Street.

I am hoping to make a bog garden and am looking for some old pond liners or other suitable waterproof sheeting. If any of your readers have any unwanted liners which they would be prepared to give to the schools I would be happy to collect them.

Yours sincerely
Joe Ennis
155 Taverners Road
Rainham ME8 9AG
Medway 235182

RAINHAM RANGERETTES

Dear Editor,

I would like to tell your readers about the Rainham Rangerettes. My mother and I started this group 19 years ago and we soon became known as one of the best carnival troupes in the country.

We later moved on to competitions and successfully took part in National and International championships, representing England several times. Our most prestigious award was when we became World Colour Guard Champions in 1990 in Amsterdam, Holland.

We also appeared on television many times, including BBC's 'Come Dancing' and 'Pebble Mill At One'.

However, we now feel that we would like to 'go back to our roots' and are starting a completely new troupe in the centre of Rainham.

Our activities include Pom Pon (Cheerleading), Colour Guard (Flag Twirling), Military Marching and Baton Twirling.

If there are any girls aged 7 to 18 years old who would like to take part in this exciting pastime, please contact me on Medway 387135 or come to see us at:

The Oast House Community Centre,
Granary Close, Station Road, Rainham
on Tuesdays, weekly, between 6.30pm and 8.30pm.
There may even be former Rangerettes who now have daughters of their own who would like to join.

Yours sincerely
Jane Bromley
(formerly Tyrer)
148 Macklands Way
Rainham

RAINHAM CYCLE CLUB

Dear Editor,

Thank you for your support (Issue 290) of our '5 Mile Challenge' which demonstrated how easy it is for people to replace their car with a cycle for most journeys. The enthusiasm and help of Councillor Pat Cooper, Sandra Woodfall from Gillingham's Environmental Department and local riders from Rainham CC was rewarded by the sight of the large crowd of eager cyclists. 121 riders aged

from 4 to 74 completed the course with only the teenagers arriving back at the park somewhat breathless.

Of all urban car journeys in the UK, 41% are under 3 miles and yet only 4% are made on cycles. If we increased our cycle use to the 40% seen in Denmark, there would be a 4% reduction in the number of people with heart disease thus saving the NHS £200 million annually. That is without calculating the effects of cleaner air. Should help a little with Medway's health care problems!

If you would like to experience the benefits of cycling yet are nervous of 'going it alone' or just want companionship or advice you will find a ready welcome with your local section of Britain's largest national cycling organisation.

Yours faithfully
Shirley Rose
Secretary
Medway Towns CTC
182 Bredhurst Road
Gillingham ME8 0QX

ORCHARD STREET SECONDARY SCHOOLS 1932-38

I have recently received a letter from Mr Maurice Manser who now lives in New South Wales, Australia. He is an ex-Rainham lad who attended Orchard Street Boys School from the time it opened in 1932 until 1938. He is making a return visit to UK from August 20th to September 30th and during that time he would very much like to obtain copies of school groups from both Secondary Schools from his time at school. Unfortunately although we have from time to time reproduced photos I do not keep copies, other than the printing proofs, and I keep no permanent record of the owners of the originals. Mr Manser will be 'flitting from place to place' as he puts it during his stay here but has two contact addresses. If you have any suitable photographs you would be willing to lend please do get in touch with him during his holiday here. The two contact addresses are: c/o Mrs E. Manser, 2 Tweed Terrace, Dymchurch Road, Hythe, Kent CT21 6LP and c/o Mr and Mrs E.C. Gransden, 2 Wallbridge Lane, Upchurch. Your help would be very much appreciated.

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Diary '95

Keeper: Mrs Christine Smith
275 Wigmore Road
Wigmore
Tel: 233098

No charge is made for Diary entries
Diary Copy Date: August 15th 1995

- August 6th – Medway Towns Footpath Group. Meet 10.00am or 2.00pm Meopham Green. 6 miles or 5 miles. Figure of Eight Walk.
- August 8th – The Gillingham & District Fuchsia & Pelargonium Society. Past Show talk. Meet 7.30pm in the Library, Howard School, Derwent Way, Rainham.
- August 8th – Medway Antiques and Collectors Club. Treasures for the Dump. Terry Haugham. 7.30pm in the Royal Victoria and Bull Hotel, High Street, Rochester.
- August 8th – Medway Scrabble Club. 2.00pm to 4.30pm. Coronation Hall, Manor Road, Chatham. Admission £1 including refreshments. All standards welcome. Telephone 867124 for further details.
- August 9th – Bredhurst WI Taste Makers. Mrs D. Banks (History of Tea and Tasting). Competition: Prettiest Tea Cup. 7.30pm in the Village Hall.
- August 9th – Rainham Flower Club – Outing.
- August 9th – Medway & District Group of HF Holidays. Meet Rainham Station 10.30am. 5 mile walk. Bring packed lunch.
- August 10th – Bredhurst Garden Club. Dr Philip and Mrs Jean Talboys – Illustrated Talk on 'Alpine Spring'. 8.00pm in the Village Hall.
- August 11th & 12th – Mrs Marie Sumner at the Oast House Theatre, Rainham, 7.30pm. Box Office 379140.
- August 12th – Bert and Mercia Read are holding a Wine and Wisdom Evening in their garden at 26 Asquith Road, Wigmore. Tickets are £4 to include wine and supper. Tables of four at 7pm for 7.30pm start. All proceeds in aid of the Cancer

Relief MEDWAY APPEAL FOR A MACMILLAN NURSE IN THE MEDWAY HOSPITAL.
Telephone Bill Trythall 230329 or Mercia Read 361194.

- August 12th – Garden Party in aid of Demelza House Children's Hospice – 1.00-4.00pm.
30 Edwin Road, Rainham. Many Stalls.
- August 13th – Medway Towns Footpath Group. 2.30pm Bredhurst. Meet at the Church. 6½ miles.
- August 13th – The Royal British Legion (Gillingham Branch) will lay a wreath at Rainham War Memorial. 11.00am commemorating the end of war in the Far East.
- August 14th – Medway Organ Club, with Janet Dowsett 7.30pm Parkwood Community Centre. All are welcome. Admission £2.00.
- August 15th – KIWs (Kent's Independent Walking Institute). Meet 'Leather Bottle' PH Cobham. 11.00am.
- August 16th – Hempstead WI. Members evening.
- August 16th – Wigmore Afternoon Townswomen's Guild. Who has been sleeping in my bed? – Mrs Hawkins. Competition: Prettiest Cup & Saucer. 2.00pm to 4.00pm. Howard Hall, Woodside, Wigmore.
- August 16th – Medway & District Group of HF Holidays. Meet Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre. 2.00pm. 4½ mile walk.
- August 17th – Rainham WI. Herbs for Health. Mrs Pat Jeffery. Competition: Herbal poem or arrangement of herbs in a 3-inch high container. 1.40pm in the Oast House Community Centre, Granary Close, Rainham.
- August 19th – Medway & District Group of HF Holidays. Meet Linton Church Car Park 2.00pm. About 5 mile walk.
- August 20th – Medway Towns Footpath Group. Meet 2.30pm Upnor Car Park near Castle. 5 mile walk.
- August 21st – Rainham Evening WI. 7.30pm Rainham Cricket Club, Berengrave Lane. Telephone 362732 for further details.
- August 22nd – Medway Scrabble Club.
- August 27th – Medway Towns Footpath Group. Meet 2.30pm Lynsted Church. 5 miles.

- September 1st – Rainham Women's Institute is holding an Art and Craft Exhibition in St Margaret's Church Hall, Orchard Street, Rainham, from 2pm to 4pm. Refreshments available. Admission 20p.
- September 2nd – Medway & District Group of HF Holidays. Meet Ramsgate Harbour Stage Coach Bus Stop. 11.35am. Coastal stroll to Broadstairs.
- September 5th – Medway Scrabble Club.
- September 8th – KIWs (Kent's Independent Walking Institute). Meet 'Chequers' PH, Loose. 11.00am.
- September 9th – Rainham Barnardo Helpers Group are organising a Charity Fair at St Margaret's Church Hall, Orchard Street, Rainham. 10.00am to 1.00pm. Refreshments available. Table (£6) Registered Charities only, further details telephone 233405 or 374644.
- September 10th – Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund are holding a BOOT FAIR at Rainham Shopping Precinct 9.30am to 12 noon. Pitches available from 8.15am. Cars £5 and vans £6. All details from Bill Trythall Medway 230329 or Janine Snow Medway 869315. All proceeds to the MEDWAY APPEAL FOR A MACMILLAN NURSE FOR THE MEDWAY HOSPITAL.
- September 11th – Medway Spinners Dyers and Weavers Association. Spinning. 7.30pm to 9.30pm in the Teachers Quiet Room, Upbury Manor School, Marlborough Road, Gillingham.
- September 16th – Kent Family History Society – Open Day – St George's Centre, Chatham Maritime. See article on page 7.
- September 24th – HORRID BIRD DAY 11am-5pm Riverside Country Park. Enjoy a day bird watching on the estuary.
- September 26th-October 7th – Medway Little Theatre present 'Absurd Person Singular' by Alan Ayckbourn. Box Office 400322.
- September 27th – Gillingham Community Countryside Events. Talk on BADGERS. 7.30pm at Riverside Country Park. Please book in advance (01634) 378987.
- September 30th – Chatham Grammar School for Girls, Reunion Luncheon 12.30-4pm in the main school hall. Tickets £12, details from June

Bourner (01634) 234930 or Pamela Barton (01634) 360506.

RAINHAM RANGERETTES meet on Tuesdays 6.30-8.30pm, Oast House Community Centre, Granary Close, Rainham. Any girls age 7-18 years welcome.

PARKWOOD FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE (50+) meet the first Wednesday of each month at Parkwood Christian Fellowship (at the back of the Health Centre). More information from Mary Tindall 365758.

HEMPSTEAD LEISURE CLUB (55+) meet on Thursday afternoons 2pm in Hempstead Village Hall. Further information from Peg 233769 or Bill 362965.

The Road Runners Racing Group, Racing Scalextric Standard Cars every Wednesday night at the Methodist Church Hall, Station Road, Rainham. 6.00pm-7.45pm. New members always welcome. (Part of Rainham Methodist Junior Youth Club).

Medway & District Caledonian Association Scottish Dancing. Every Thursday at the Oasthouse, Granary Close, Rainham. 7.30pm.

Bredhurst Receiving and Transmitting Society meet every Thursday at 8.15pm in the Parkwood Community Centre.

Gillingham Flower Arrangers. New members welcome. 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month. 7.00pm-9.00pm, St Mark's Church Hall, Vicarage Road, Gillingham. Information tel: 371328.

Rainham and District Winemakers Guild. Meet 8.00pm at St Margaret's Church Hall, Orchard Street. 3rd Wednesday in the month.

The Royal Marine Association, Chatham Branch. Meeting place HMS Wildfire, Kyber Road, Gillingham. 7.30pm, 1st and 3rd Monday in the month, bank holidays excepted.

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Correspondence

17th GILLINGHAM CUB SCOUTS

SCOTT PACK

Dear Editor,

May I, through your column, express my thanks to the many parents, cubs and 'ex-cubs' who turned up at the unexpected re-union recently at Wakeley School and for their kind send-off. What started as a favour to the then Akela of Scott Pack, Pat Smith, by taking the cubs for weekly football coaching sessions at the Rainham Rec has lasted six years and, with the support of the parents, has provided all of us with some memorable moments on and off the field.

It has also led to my wife and I, as leader and helper, becoming more closely involved in Scouting activities e.g. Summer Camp, and enabled us to develop during this time a number of friendships which still exist today.

Although it was my intention to quietly bring my involvement to a close, it was a pleasure to see so many 'old' faces again, and my wife has duly received the 'yellow card' for her part in the proceedings.

Yours sincerely
R.E. Link
64 Farnham Close
Rainham ME8 8NR

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Here's your chance to meet old friends, look around the school remembering past times and see how the school has been shaped for the future.

Tickets £12 (including wine or soft drinks). For further details contact June Bourner (01634) 234930 or Pamela Barton (01634) 360506.

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THE RAINHAM PLAN – 30 YEARS ON

I recently noticed a report which indicated that Gillingham Borough Council had agreed to compulsorily acquire land on the northern side of Longley Road which they considered an eyesore and I wondered if the members were told that it was the Council which caused the original blight. This goes back thirty years when a plan was produced (reprinted herewith) by consultants, after an exhaustive survey, for the regeneration of the village.

I started the process by putting down a motion of 'no confidence' in the Planning Committee who had been turning down applications for the enlargement and the development of shops in Rainham High Street. This was brought to a head when Woolworths applied to enlarge premises, now Lukehurst's main shop, which had previously been a cycle shop with the old cinema adjacent. The Council refused this application with others and I considered that the natural development of High Street shopping was being stifled to the detriment of Rainham residents.

I knew that the Borough Engineer strongly favoured a new Shopping Centre and I felt that the refusals were part of a plan to bring that about. My censure motion created a degree of personal acrimony but the Council resolved to appoint consultants to advise on the future shopping needs and its location and changes which might improve the central area of Rainham.

I considered this a waste of public funds as if a new shopping centre was to be created then there were only two possible locations in close proximity to the top of Station Road which has always been recognised as the central point of the village. One of these sites was where the shops were ultimately built and the other was between Station Road and Ivy Street, just behind the Co-operative store which was then open land having once been the grazing area for Jacobs dairy.

The plan proposed by the consultants went far beyond what was anticipated but it included various pet ideas which had been 'floated' by senior officers and some members from time to time. A major bypass was included, running parallel south of the A2 from Holding Street to just east of Miers Court Road which itself would be widened and rebuilt leading into a new loop road running eventually along the line of Hothfield Road and Tufton Road and then sweeping south around the outside edge of a new shopping centre served by large car parks and a bus station. Readers will note that the bottom of Orchard Street was diverted to connect up with the new loop road under a major fly over. Rainham High Street and the top of Station Road would be for pedestrians only with no through traffic between Holding Street and Miers Court Road.

It is interesting to see the number of shop units

recommended, less than half of which have been built and some of those are empty.

The Council adopted the recommendations in total. I was strongly opposed as I considered that the centre of Rainham would be divided into four distinct areas: (1) south of the bypass; (2) between the bypass and the High Street, with hardly any provision for access; (3) between the High Street and the loop road; and (4) north of the loop road.

Both routes of the proposed bypass and the new loop road with other properties covered by the plan caused an immediate blight. The whole of the area on the south side of Tufton Road to the north side of Longley Road was a 'reserved space' all of which caused consternation and a great deal of worry to numerous residents who realised that their properties were devalued and probably could not be sold. Both Gillingham Borough Council and the KCC had to buy properties along the routes of the proposed roads and of course the route of the proposed bypass (as amended) is still in the structure plan so much of that area is still blighted. Some residents in Station Road moved and I know that Wilkin's the hardware shop on the corner of Tufton Road had to be acquired.

Whilst many residents were worried and some probably lost money inevitably there were other landowners who prospered by the proposals. Much of the shopping centre and car park was a cherry orchard and the Co-operative shop was built mainly on the old school site.

I left the Council in 1967 and have no record of when the proposed new loop road was deleted from the plan but it was in for some years and blighted the area of land in Longley Road which is now the subject of concern and possible acquisition. To the best of my knowledge this land was owned by Holden's, a firm of builders, who applied for various developments which were refused. It just shows how Authorities produce plans which have a profound effect upon residents for good or ill for many years.

The main point made by the consultants was that every effort should be made to 'recapture an intimate village atmosphere otherwise Rainham would be swallowed up by the ever-expanding Medway Towns and would completely lose any identity or character of its own'. I leave readers to decide if the slightest vestige of 'village atmosphere' remains. It was considered that the eastern part of the Borough had a potential population of 40 to 50,000 which would justify a new shopping centre but it was emphasised that this should not be large enough to pose a threat to the main centres of Chatham and Gillingham (how different from the attitude adopted over the Savacentre). The consultants claimed that their plan would preserve and improve the character of the village but in my view one of the main errors was the demolition of the old Church School at the top of Station Road, this took away one of the four buildings in that area which were necessary to

preserve the soul of the village and its retention would have enabled community activities to have been centralised in a building to which many of us already had a close attachment.

So what have we got from the grandiose plans of thirty years ago – we have a shopping centre comprising about half of the shops then proposed with a car park but no bus station. Many of the retail shops in the High Street have become banks, estate agents or offices, the bypass has never been built but remains in the plan causing blight along its proposed route and the new loop road which caused so much concern to residents was presumably subsequently removed from the plan.

Whatever the intentions, Rainham was destroyed as a village a long while ago – it's just part of the sprawling conurbation of Medway which looks like spreading ever further in future years.

Freddie Cooper

MRS MARIE SUMNER 'A LADY OF THE NAUGHTY NINETIES'

A multi-talented, high professional entertainer is set to delight the local people in the coming weeks when she brings her one-woman show to the Oast House Theatre, Rainham. When I first saw her I was completely captivated. Who is she? She is Mrs Marie Sumner who calls herself 'A Lady of the Naughty Nineties'.

Marie's show is a Soirée of Victorian parlour songs and memorable melodies, with a hint of naughtiness, from the great age of Edwardian Music Hall. This she presents in the most enticing and captivating way. She positively sparkles! Her costumes are superb. A kaleidoscope of colour and elegance, but most appealing about this charismatic performer is her personable relaxed manner.

It is to Marie's credit that, after only two years as a professional Equity member, she can offer the public her own special brand of entertainment, which is a real delight, a refreshing change and something different. Together with her wit and humour, and the enthusiastic audience participation she generates, one is assured of a spell-binding, first class show.

I am particularly pleased to say that she has

chosen to promote the Theatre Royal Trust. 'It just seemed to be so appropriate' she said 'since I call myself A Lady of the Naughty Nineties, a time when the Theatre Royal was planned and built in Chatham.' Since she has been a regular at the world famous Leeds City Varieties Music Hall 'The Good Old Days' she has developed a real love of the old theatres with their ambience and atmosphere. 'There's nothing like them,' she says. 'When I am at Leeds I usually have the same dressing room that Charlie Chaplin used 100 years ago. His spirit, together with all those after him, lingers on – it's magical!'

That very ambience and atmosphere Marie talks about is captured at the Oast House Theatre and is also in Chatham, slumbering at present, while the ardent campaigners of the Theatre Royal Trust strive to bring it back to life.

Marie will be presenting her show on the 11th & 12th August, 7.30pm at the Oast House Theatre, Rainham. Don't miss it – you'll never see anything like it on the local stage!

Box Office 01634 379140.

Colin Bourner
Theatre Royal Trust



Mrs Marie Sumner 'A Lady for the Naughty Nineties', who is appearing at the Oast House Theatre in August.

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Countryside Events

AUGUST

Drama Fun

Monday 7th August

Sessions at 10.00am (for 2½ to 5 years)

11.30am (for 6 to 8 years)

1.30pm (for 9 to 11 years)

Come and have fun taking part in these drama workshops with an environmental theme. The Kic Theatre Company are leading these exciting workshops. Children under 8 must be accompanied. All sessions are one hour long.

Please book in advance. Telephone 01634 378987.

At Riverside Country Park.

Butterfly Walk

Sunday 13th August

2.00pm to 4.00pm

Explore the diverse butterfly fauna of Darland Banks Nature Reserve. Learn more about these beautiful insects with a local expert.

Please book in advance. Telephone 01634 378987.

Meet at Hoath Close.

Kite Making

Monday 14th August

11.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 3.00pm.

A kite making and kite flying session at Riverside Country Park led by community artist Cas Holmes. Children under 8 years must be accompanied.

Please book in advance. Telephone 01634 378987.

At Riverside Country Park.

Mask Making

Monday 21st August

Sessions at 10.00am, 11.30am, 1.30pm and 3.00pm.

Come and colour a beautiful animal mask with mask designer Sally Rose Gibson. Children under 8 must be accompanied. East session last one hour maximum.

Please book in advance. Telephone 01634 378987.

At Riverside Country Park.

COUNTRYSIDE EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

Horrid Bird Day

Sunday 24th September

11.00am to 5.00pm

Horrid Hill at Riverside Country Park is an excellent vantage point for bird-watching on the internationally important Medway Estuary. There will be birdwalks and other attractions at this event.

Telephone 01634 378987 for bookings and further information.

At Riverside Country Park.

Badgers

Wednesday 27th September

7.30pm start.

Come and discover more about these attractive yet persecuted animals from this talk by badger expert Martin Newcombe.

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Nature Notes

NATURE NOTES FOR JULY

By the beginning of July the fresh greens of Spring
had turned into the darker, deeper hues of Summer.
In many places the roadside flowers were
predominantly purple or blue — common mallow,
marsh thistle, rosebay willowherb and field
scabious. The skylark, yellow hammer and turtle
dove could still be heard in many parts of the North
Downs.

According to the British Butterfly Conservation
Society, anyone going for a walk in the countryside
on a Summer's day a hundred years ago would have
expected to see many butterflies, perhaps even
clouds of them. The fall in the number of butterflies
over the last century has been attributed largely to
losses of their habitat, such as fens, managed
deciduous woodland and flower-rich meadows. One
such meadow, which continues to support a number
of species of butterfly, lies on the edge of Bredhurst
Wood. In early July the predominant flowers there
were yellow rattle, birdsfoot trefoil, ox-eye daisy,
red clover, smooth catsear and pyramidal orchid. The
main grasses (the caterpillars of many species of
butterfly feed on certain grasses) were cocksfoot,
common quaking grass and upright broom. The
butterflies that could be seen in the meadow in early
July were small heath, meadow brown, gatekeeper
(or hedge brown), common blue and brown argus.
Surrounded by trees, the field looks much the same
as it would have done a hundred years ago and
probably supports as many butterflies as it did then.
Only a row of overhead electricity pylons spoils the
illusion of walking through a flower-rich hay
meadow in the reign of Queen Victoria.

This year I have not been too successful with nests

in my garden. A lack of caterpillars and other insects
during a particularly bad spell of cold, wet weather
resulted in the starvation of some young great tits
and wrens. Furthermore, a cat killed two clutches of
young blackbirds. The Royal Society for the
Protection of Birds states that cats appear to be the
worst predator of garden birds. I have tried
unsuccessfully on a number of occasions in the past
to protect vulnerable nests from cats. But once
young nestlings start calling for food they will
inevitably attract the attention of any passing cat and
when this happens they are usually doomed. It is of
course a natural instinct for cats to hunt and we have
to be philosophical about the occasional loss of a
clutch of young birds. In the wild our familiar garden
birds are the prey of stoats and weasels, far more
formidable and successful hunters than the domestic
cat.

Barn owls are once again breeding on the farm of
a local fruit farmer. The birds alternate between two
sites, depending upon whether a pair of kestrels
beats them to their favourite one. Barn owls feed
mainly on rodents (rats, moles, mice, voles, shrews)
but also on small birds and insects. The pair in
question find plenty of small mammals in the many
patches of rough grass scattered about the farm.
Writing about the barn owl in 1894, in his book 'The
Birds of Rainham', Walter Prentis said that 'this
most useful bird, I am sorry to say, is a victim to
persecution by every pop gunner in the parish on
coming, as it sometimes does. Its life after visiting
our stacks once or twice is sure to be sacrificed. I
have known a pair to breed more than once in our
church roof, but this is a few years ago.' Man is still
the barn owl's main enemy. These days, however,
the owl is less likely to die at the hands of a 'pop
gunner' and more likely to be hit by a motorist,
speeding along a country road or lane in the dusk or
dark.

Joe Ennis

Small Ads

Published: September 2nd
Copy date: August 20th
Price: £1.20 per line

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