

ACTION FORUM

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY FOR RAINHAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREA ■

JULY 2001
NUMBER 358



Ma Barrett, with some of her helpers, outside the Solomon Road School Canteen, see letters and articles inside.

Robert J. Kitney

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Next Issue: AUGUST 4th
Copy Date: July 17th Sm Ads Jul 20th
Editorial: Mrs Barbara Mackay Miller,
5 Meresborough Cotts, Tel: 231307.
Advertising: Hamish Mackay Miller,
5 Meresborough Cotts, Tel: 231307.

Editorial

The article John Austin wrote for Action Forum in May about Mrs Barrett and the Council School Canteen has stirred many memories and we include several more reminiscences this month. Our front cover photograph was supplied by a relative who now lives away from this area but all correspondents agree it was Ma Barrett's complete control of her charges followed by such a gentle voice that sticks in their memories. Apparently before the canteen was built, one of the earliest in the area, she was the cleaner at the school and so had a very long connection with Solomon Road. Education continues throughout life and Medway Council are even now putting the final preparations to their Adult Education programme for the autumn. By now, they say, we should each have received a directory of courses through our letterbox. If you have not, please notify Marilyn Elford the Marketing Manager at the Council on 01634 850235. Last year a great many people did not receive copies but by the time we realised we should have had them it was too late to do anything about it.

Forsaking tradition this year we abandoned our annual Guide camp, under canvas, and took the girls on a holiday to Switzerland, primarily to visit the international centre 'Our Chalet' at Adelboden, but of course to enjoy a little bit of Swiss life in the mountains 'Heidi' style as well. The weather was perfect, too hot for me on some days, and as we managed to arrange the use of a coach for outings every day we wanted, we were able to have lots of excursions. One of the highlights which I think the girls will remember for a long time was walking down the mountainside, under a clear blue sky, among all the spring flowers, with the ringing of cow bells in our ears, to visit an isolated woodcarvers chalet - they will certainly recall the climb back up as the temperature soared towards the 30s at midday! Snow topped mountains, tremendous waterfalls and a snow fight with the neighbouring scout troop on top of the world at the revolving restaurant on Schilthorn, one of the highest mountains in Europe, will also stick in their memories. Altogether a week packed with new experiences which compares even now with a scrapbook of the same journey made by Rainham Rangers in 1933 led by Miss Johnson to 'Our Chalet' a year after it was built. Whilst we were there we

gave the present Warden this book to be kept in the international archives.

We have had an enquiry recently for information about a pub called The Lord Stanley, supposedly in Upchurch; if anyone has any information please do get in touch. A new web site is being set up by a local enthusiast to correlate local history, so that it is available for research, a mammoth task I feel but if you have any relevant information Andrew James (01634 264299) would be glad to hear from you.

The weather is good, the footpaths have been reopened and the fields, hedgerows and orchards are beautiful, so what better time than now to get back in the walking habit. Have a good month and we will see you in August.

Correspondence

MUSICAL RECITALS

Dear Editor,

May I draw your readers' attention to two musical events which traditionally draw good audiences from Rainham and Wigmore, both of which involve local players.

On Friday July 20th Karen Brown and Martyn Williams give a recital of music for flute and piano at the delightful Nettlestead Place, outside of Maidstone. Karen is from Rainham, and has done a number of recitals in Rainham itself and the Medway Towns in general, as well as further afield. Rainham Citroen and Honda dealer Hidsons support the duo and the intriguing theme title of this recital is 'The Birds and the Bees'. It will include much new repertoire as well as some items from past recitals, and profits go to the Friedrich's Ataxia Society and the Demelza Children's Hospice.

Just over a week earlier, on Saturday 14th July, the Old Barn Orchestra gives its summer concert in Staplehurst. The Chairman, Leader and several other players are from Rainham and Wigmore, and the orchestra's last concert at the St George's Centre, Chatham Dockyard, attracted a large local audience. The music in July is little known, but instantly attractive, from composers Dubois, Fuchs and Gounod. Try something unknown - it won't bite! (nor offend). Profits go to the Heart of Kent Hospice.

Both concerts start at 7.30pm, cost £6 (£2 students and children) and include interval refreshments. For more details please ring 376979 or e-mail edenhouse@cwcom.net

Yours sincerely,
Colin Brown

BARNARDO'S

You are invited to our annual Strawberry Tea Party on Saturday July 28th 2001 at 32 Roberts Road, from 2-4pm. Come and enjoy a pleasant afternoon. Stalls, Raffle and meet friends old and new.

Tickets £1.50 available from 233405 or 234053.

SPONSORED KEEP FIT

Dear Editor,

We are having a sponsored Keep Fit Display at Signal Court, Station Road, Rainham, on Saturday July 21st in aid of The Heart Foundation and The East Kent Renal Department at The Kent & Canterbury Hospital. There will be Bring & Buy, Cakes, Refreshments and a Raffle. Entrance is 20p, doors open at 10.00am and the two displays will be at 10.30am, and 12.30pm. Please do come along with your friends to support these worthwhile charities.

Yours faithfully,
Denise Hazeldel
01634 234164

ORGAN RECITAL

Dear Editor,

Professor Dr Christoph Lorenz, the organist of Dusseldorf Cathedral, will give a recital on the organ of St Thomas of Canterbury Church, London Road, Rainham, on Wednesday, 18th July at 8.00pm.

All proceeds from the recital will go to the Padre Pio Rehabilitation Centre at Ahotokurom, Ghana; which provides all aspects of care for people with leprosy and their families. Recently, a Scholarship Scheme has been introduced which is enabling the young people of the Centre to aspire either to paid work or professional careers.

Tickets for the recital are £3 and are available on the evening at the door.

Yours sincerely,
Dorothy Morris (Mrs)

INNER WHEEL CLUB OF GILLINGHAM

Dear Editor,

Inner Wheel members are the wives, partners, widows and daughters of Local Rotarians, mainly from the Gillingham Rotary Club.

We have been in existence for 71 years and our aims are to promote true Friendship, encourage ideals of personal service and foster international understanding. In short, we help out wherever and whenever we can, particularly locally.

We regularly support the British Red Cross Society, Samaritans, Cerebral Palsy Care, Stepping Stones and Demelza House, as well as Sume Project and Lepira abroad.

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We thought it was about time everyone in the area knew about us and so we are holding a Coffee Morning and fund raising Bazaar on Saturday September 1st, 10.30am, at the home of our President at Papillon, 7 Houghton Avenue, Hempstead. Please come along and support us and therefore your local charities, particularly The Oliver Fisher Neonatal Unit which is our special charity for this year.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and we look forward to seeing you on the 1st of September.

If there are any ladies out there who are wives and widows or daughters of Rotarians and would like to become members of Inner Wheel please come along to the Coffee Morning and make yourselves known to us.

Yours sincerely,
Rosemarie A. Barnes (Mrs)
President - Inner Wheel
Club of Gillingham

GILLINGHAM MARCHING BAND

The Gillingham Marching Band is looking for new members between 8 and 25 years of age to join them. No experience is necessary as full training is given and instruments and uniforms are provided.

They meet on Wednesday evenings between 7.30 and 9.30pm at St Margaret's School, Orchard Street, Rainham.

For more information contact Alex Farmer (Band Master) Tel: 01634 366702.
E-mail: gillinghammb@lineone.net

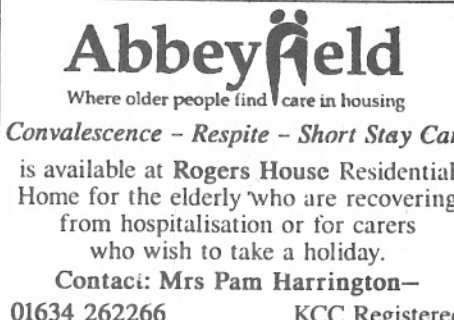


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Keeper: Mrs Christine Smith
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Wigmore
Tel: 233098

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Diary Copy Date: 17th July 2001

July 7th – St Peter's Church Summer Fete, Bredhurst Village Hall. 2.00pm. Display by Black Lion Gymnastic Club, Children's Races and all usual attractions.

July 8th – Mid-Kent Astronomical Society. Solar Observing at Riverside Country Park. 11.00am to 5.30pm. Members will be setting up telescopes for safe viewing of the sun. Weather permitting. Ring 308035 for details.

July 9th to 21st – Medway Little Theatre present Duncan Rand One Act Play Festival. Box Office 01634 400322.

July 10th – Gillingham and District Fuchsia & Pelargonium Society. OUR MINI SHOW. A chance for all members to bring back your Distribution Plants for judging by Ted Sweetman from New Zealand, followed by a talk commenting on our Show. Please enter your plants. 7.30pm, The Rainham School for Girls, Derwent Way, Rainham.

July 10th – Rainham Afternoon Townswomen's Guild. Bee Keeping – Mr Clare. 2.00pm, St Margaret's Millennium Centre, Gatekeeper Chase, Rainham.

July 10th – Medway Antique and Collectors Club. Spode 1790-1833. A history of its development – Mr Geoffrey Fisk. 7.30 for 8.00pm, Gordon Hotel, High Street, Rochester. New members welcome, ring 366586 for details.

July 10th – Invicta Dog Training Club. Socialising and Fun Classes. 7.30 to 9.00pm. Hartlip Village Hall. For further information telephone 01795 842776.

July 11th – Bredhurst WI. Mr Eamon French, RNLI. Competition: An Item in Copper. 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

July 11th – Rainham Flower Club (Kent). Workshop. 7.30 to 9.30pm, St Margaret's Millennium Centre.

July 11th – Rochester & West Kent Art Society. A day's painting in Rye. Those wishing to come please contact Pat Maynard-Smith saying whether they can give other people a lift or whether they would need a lift. For further details telephone 01634 233053.

July 11th – Gillingham Marching Band. Practices start at 7.30pm at St Margaret's School, Orchard Street, Rainham. New members always welcome. For more information contact Alex Farmer (Band Master) on 01634 366702. E-mail: gillinghammb@lineone.net

July 11th – Countryside Event, Evening Bird Cruise, tickets £12 in advance, ring 378987 to book.

July 11th – Medway Camcorder Club, Medway Yacht Club, Borstal, 7.30pm. Camera Techniques, ring 371570 for details.

July 12th – Wigmore Thursday Club. Demelza Hospice – Talk by Chris Masters. 2.00pm, St Matthew's Community Centre, Drewery Drive,

July 12th-14th & 19th-21st – RATS present 'Dead Guilty' by Richard Harris. 8.00pm at Oasthouse Theatre, Rainham. £4.80, Box Office 360506 (weekdays 9am to 8pm).

July 13th – Mid-Kent Astronomical Society. Find out about Atoms with Emma Nicholson in her talk 'Atoms for Dummies' (see 8th July).

July 14th – The National Childbirth Trust. 11.00am to 2.00pm. Teddy Bears Fete & Fun Day at Jigsaw Day Nursery, Chatham, for children 0-8 years. £2.50 per child, under-ones free. (Parental supervision) Bring a picnic. For more information call 07950 939898 or visit website: www.nctmedway.org.uk

July 14th – Garden Party in aid of Demelza Hospice and the Bredhurst Cat Shelter, 93 Berengrave Lane, 2.00pm, ring 233795 or 389668 for details. Do come and bring your friends.

July 14th – Garden Party at 55 Bredhurst Road, 2.30 to 4.30pm. Tickets £1.50 including light refreshment, in aid of Medway Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund, everyone welcome, ring 232158 for details.

July 14th – Old Barn Orchestra Summer Concert, Staplehurst. 7.30pm start. Tickets £6, profits to charity. Ring 376979 for details.

July 16th – Rainham Evening WI. Letter 'G'. Hop Pickers, Hovels, Huts & Houses with Slides – Robin Walton. 7.30pm, Platters Farm Lodge, Highfield Road, Rainham.

July 16th – Medway Spinners, Dyers & Weavers Association. Talk on History of Fashion and Fabrics by Mrs Grace Wakefield, 7.30 to 9.30pm at the Annex (Urchins Playgroup) building in Marlborough Road, Gillingham.

July 17th – Medway Scrabble Club. 2.00 to 4.30pm. Riverside Indoor Bowls Complex, Chatham.

July 17th – Gillingham Horticultural Society. Floral Art Group. Weaving, Plaiting and Manipulation – a Teach In with Carol and Pat. 7.30pm, United Reformed Church, Balmoral Road, Gillingham. New members welcome. For further details telephone 234734.

July 18th – Bredhurst Garden Club. Joanna Westgate Talk 'Creating Habitats for Wildlife'. AFRICAN VIOLET SHOW. 8.00pm in the Village Hall. July 18th – Wigmore Afternoon Townswomen's Guild. D.I.Y. Cream Tea. Competition to be announced. 1.45 to 4.15pm, Howard Hall, Woodside, Wigmore.

July 18th – Rochester & West Kent Art Society. Lower Halstow – Lapwing Drive, overlooking the Estuary. Time after 3.30pm.

July 18th – St Thomas of Canterbury, London Road, Rainham. 8.00pm. Organ Recital by Professor Dr Christoph Lorenz, Organist. Admission £3.

July 18th – Gillingham Marching Band (see 11th July).

July 19th – Rainham WI. Speaker: Mr R. Black – HM Customs & Excise. 1.45pm, Methodist Church Hall, corner of Wakeley and Station Road, Rainham.

July 19th – Wigmore Thursday Club. Brian Higbee entertains for the last time (see 12th July).

July 20th – Countryside Event. Glow worm and moth walk. 9.00pm start, Darland Bank. Ring 812196 to book.

July 20th – Flute & Piano Recital. Nettlestead Place, outside Maidstone. Karen Brown and Martyn

Williams perform 'The Birds and the Bees'. 7.30pm start. Tickets £6 in aid of charity. Ring 376979 for details.

July 21st – Sponsored Keep Fit in aid of Heart Foundation & Renal Department, Canterbury Hospital. Signal Court, Rainham, from 10.00am. Stalls and Refreshments. Admission 20p.

July 21st – Quiz Night, 8.00pm start, Oasthouse Community Centre, Granary Close, adjacent to Rainham Station. For details ring 374558.

July 24th – Rainham Evening Machine Knitting Club. 8.00 to 10.00pm, at our new venue: The Red Cross (Gillingham Centre), 21 Balmoral Road, Gillingham. New members are welcome. For details telephone 01634 862673.

July 25th – Gillingham Marching Band (see 11th July).

July 25th – Medway Camcorder Club. History of Chatham Dockyard (see 11th July).

July 26th – Wigmore Thursday Club. Club Outing to Margate – Lunch and Theatre.

July 26th – Rainham & District Dolls House & Miniaturist Group. 7.30pm, Oast House, Granary Close, Station Road, Rainham. For further information telephone Sylvia Wildridge 312038.

July 27th – Mid-Kent Astronomical Society. Talk by David Hewett on 'Extra Solar Planets'. Come along and find out about planets beyond our Solar System. For further information telephone 01634 308035.

July 27th – Folk Club at Oasthouse, Community Centre, Granary Close, Rainham, 8.00 to 11.00pm. Contact Lynn Cass 370327 for details.

July 28th – Gillingham and District Fuchsia & Pelargonium Society. Our Annual Show Day in the Main Hall, Rainham School for Girls, Derwent Way, Rainham.

July 28th – Barnardo's Strawberry Tea Party, 2.00 to 4.00pm at 32 Roberts Road. Tickets £1.50 from 233405 & 234053.

July 28th – Tales from the Mariners. The Three Mariners, 509 Lower Rainham Road, 7.30pm. June Peters. £4, concessions £2.

Continued on page 13

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Correspondence

RAINHAM WEB SITE

Dear Editor,

I would like to inform your readers of a web site that I am developing to record and preserve the history of Rainham. I would like this site to become an archive for information on Rainham and a resource for those wanting to research the area. I would therefore be interested in any information that would be suitable, preferably in electronic format. I would appreciate any information that would be suitable, for example photographs or historical information. I already have some photos of Wigmore from my grandmother, which you recently published in Action Forum, but would like copies of any others, even those taken much more recently. I would like to add that this site is not being developed for profit, but due to my interest in local history.

The web site address is either www.rainham-history.co.uk or www.rainhamhistory.co.uk Both lead to the same site, but it depends which is considered easier to use.

If anyone has any suitable material I can be contacted on 01634 264299 or mobile 07710 444227. My e-mail address is ajames@message2u.co.uk

Yours sincerely,
Andrew James

ACCIDENT

Dear Editor,

I am trying to trace a young Mum, an 'angel of mercy' who helped me when I had a very nasty accident three weeks before Easter and who disappeared immediately she saw me safely back to my home.

In your April issue you mentioned both the problem with litter and the halt on walks in the countryside during the foot and mouth crisis. Although 71, until my accident I enjoyed several forms of exercise, walking both at home and abroad being one of them - for a short period I helped to deliver Action Forum.

Whoever left a circle of thin wire on the pavement of London Road in Rainham (near Bloors Lane foot-

bridge) is responsible for causing me a permanent injury but I am hoping your excellent publication can help me find my saviour.

The young Mum I am seeking was driving a small white or cream car (maybe a Fiesta) and had her little girl or boy in the back. It was on the first day of Spring, March 21st, at 10.15am. If anyone knows who this was please contact me via Action Forum.

Pat Lilly

THE ROYAL STAR AND GARTER HOME MILITARY TATTOO

Dear Editor,

The Royal Star and Garter Home for disabled ex-servicemen and women are staging a charity tattoo which will take place on Saturday evening, 4th August, at the Historic Dockyard, Chatham. The band of the Royal Engineers and the Rochester Pipe Band will be appearing along with several other attractions. Simon Weston, OBE, will be attending as guest of honour. For further information please contact Colin Obee, tel: 91634 234973.

LADIES BADMINTON CLUB

A Rainham Afternoon Ladies Badminton Club meets every Tuesday throughout the year at St Thomas' Church Hall, London Road, Rainham, from 1.30 to 4.00pm. New members are always welcome at this friendly non competitive group. If you are interested in joining us or would like more information do contact Wendy on 07787 333222 or call in on any Tuesday afternoon.

'DEAD GUILTY' by Richard Harris

July 12:13:14:19:20:21

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Oasthouse Theatre, Rainham, Kent.

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Nature Notes

NATURE NOTES FOR JUNE

My late grandfather, Joe Ennis, was a smallholder and coal miner who lived on the edge of Charnwood Forest in Leicestershire. During the First World War he served with the 175th Tunnelling Company of the Royal Engineers, digging tunnels under enemy lines. Working underground with his pick and shovel he escaped the carnage above. During the long and bitter miners' strike of 1926 he supplemented his income from the farm by hedging and ditching for other farmers and by gardening at the big houses in Charnwood Forest.

Grandfather Joe could be very cantankerous and visitors to the farm were not always welcome. I soon learned, however, that he was very fond of his swallows and so, whenever I visited him, I took the earliest possible opportunity of enquiring about them. At least two pairs of swallows usually nested at the farm, one in the back porch to the house and one in a brick-built cattle shelter called 'the hovel' which was in the fields across the road. The pair in the porch got used to Grandfather coming and going and so it was possible to stand in the porch and watch the parents feeding their young. It was a great privilege to be trusted by those two swallows.

Grandfather is now dead and the farm sold. The porch has been demolished and the hovel stands almost roofless. Loss of habitat is one of the reasons for the decline in the numbers of swallows. Another is the widespread use of agricultural insecticides.

The swallow is a visitor to this country from late March into October and usually returns to the same nesting site year after year. Its nest is typically built on a beam in a barn or other farm shed and is made of a shallow cup of mud and grass lined with feathers and hair. Two or three broods are reared and nestlings may be found well into September. The sight of swallows skimming over water or buttercup meadows on a sunny June day is, for me, the epitome of Summer.

Despite a decline in their numbers nationally, swallows can still be seen at a number of local farms,

including Gore Farm at Upchurch. Although one traditional nesting site at the farm, a long and open cart shed, has recently been converted to residential use, one section remains open as a garage and a pair of swallows has nested there. Other pairs have returned to nesting sites in other farm buildings.

Mr Blee, the owner of Gore Farm, is rightly proud of what is, in effect, a nature reserve as well as a working fruit farm. Apart from the orchards and soft fruits, there is a wild flower meadow, a wood and an artificial lake, all of which can be visited via nature trails. At the Barn Yard, which is off Oak Lane, one can buy fruit and vegetables and have a cup of tea or a meal. Mr Blee publishes a bulletin every new season which includes news of the birds, animals and flowers that can be seen at Gore Farm. The latest bulletin refers to the kestrels that are rearing young in a nest box at the barn, the grey and red legged partridges that are nesting in the long grassy banks of the former brickfields, the ever increasing badger population and the many shelduck that have laid eggs either down rabbit holes or between the large round bales of straw.

If you come across Mr Blee whilst at Gore Farm (he is, I suppose, about fifty years of age and has the ruddy complexion of someone who works out of doors) do ask him about his swallows – or indeed about his resident barn owls, his pair of little grebes, his three species of woodpecker. He will be very pleased to tell you about them.

Joe Ennis

WATCH WHERE YOU WALK!

Since I moved to Rainham thirty years ago the introduction of traffic lights, roundabouts, pelican crossings, chicanes and other interesting items has provided plenty to keep the driver alert in Maidstone Road. The pedestrian has more time to observe the many different styles of building there, and the beauty or otherwise of the gardens fronting each house. But beneath their feet walkers can also trace the history of Rainham's water supply as illustrated by the stopcock covers in the pavement.

Freddie Cooper mentioned the Rainham Waterworks Company in his article in April this year, and outside many houses in Maidstone Road and

elsewhere the initials RWC can be seen on the metal stopcock covers. Closer study reveals that during its existence the company, which was set up by a few shareholders in 1881, obtained its covers from at least three different sources: Hayward Tyler & Co., London; Needhams, Stockport; and Littlewood & Son of Sittingbourne. In 1895 Frederick Littlewood was trading as 'engineer, millwright, brassfounder, tank and boilermaker and artesian well borer' at 33 High Street, Milton, and the firm, still producing castings, is on almost the same site – No. 35 – today.

The Rainham Water Company originally obtained its water from Keycol, via mains laid by the Milton Rural Sanitary Authority to supply Newington and Lower Halstow. In 1900, however, the Company opened its own works at White Hill, Rainham Mark. This drew water from a borehole which went down 920 feet into the Lower Greensand, producing extremely soft water. By 1903 this supplied Miers Court, parts of Upchurch and Hartlip and most of Lower Halstow (Meresborough had to wait until 1908 for mains water).

As demand grew Rainham Waterworks Company constructed further works and reservoirs at Bredhurst, at the top of Maidstone Road in Wigmore and at Matts Hill. A new borehole sunk here only went down into the chalk, so the water it produced was not as soft as the White Hill supply.

In 1946 Rainham's Company was amalgamated with the Chatham and District Waterworks Company, and I have spotted at least two different designs of cover bearing the initials C&DDW (1938) or CDWW (1954). The Chatham and District became part of Medway Water Board in 1956; this was absorbed by the Southern Water Authority in 1974; since 1989 our water has been supplied by Southern Water Services Ltd. All these authorities adopted stopcock covers with the appropriate initials, but replacements today seem to be anonymous.

When I found covers in Maidstone Road with BCGRWW (two dates, 1902 and 1911) I was puzzled, but thanks to Ron Martin, who was based for many years at the waterworks at Luton, I now know that these covers reflect the existence of the Brompton, Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester Waterworks Company, which had become part of the

Chatham and District in 1925. It appears that at least one water authority has been thrifty, perhaps when replacing cracked or broken examples, in using up covers belonging to several of its predecessors. This may explain why the dates on the covers outside some houses do not match the actual buildings. There is a particularly wide variety of covers in Quinell and Holding Streets, amongst them one with initials CWC ...

Perhaps readers may come across other examples: if so, I would be interested to know of them.

Rosemary Dellar (01634 230324)

SOLOMON ROAD SCHOOL CANTEN HUT

I enjoyed reading the article by John Austin in your May 2001 issue about the Barretts of Solomon Road School. I cannot think that any of their descendants would take umbrage at the affectionate tone of the words. One does not need to be famous to achieve immortality and Mrs Barrett has done just that. Several times a year either I or friends I am visiting use the words (sternly) 'Hands together! Eyes closed' (gently) 'Say your grace, dears'. My own memories are coloured by a conflict of ambitions between Mrs Barrett and myself. She intended me to eat her cabbage; I had no intention of doing so, my preferred diet at the time being peas and gravy. On the whole I think I won. The answer was to sit with others who didn't like cabbage, to eat the bits of the meal you did like and to push your plate to the middle of the table. When Mrs Barrett carried out her post prandial inspection and demanded that you ate the cabbage, you just said that you could not remember which was your plate. This ploy totally floored her. Mrs Barrett was a very dynamic character. In contrast, my impression of Mr Barrett was that he was a rather lugubrious man. I put this down to the fact that he could not work out a reason not to eat his wife's cabbage.

My now distant memories of Solomon Road School are happy. As with Mrs Barrett and the cabbage, the primary aim was always to beat the system. For example, air raid shelter space at the school was at a premium and your first ambition was to find friends in Solomon Road whose house you

Continued on page 11

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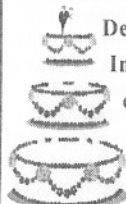


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SOLOMON ROAD SCHOOL CANTEN Cont could rush to whenever the air raid siren sounded. I found such friends in the Appletons, who would always offer you whatever goodies rationing allowed while you waited for the all clear. If goodies were available, your hearing was always a bit suspect when the all clear sounded and you took your time getting back.

My only real claim to fame was that I eventually got to the exalted position of morning school bell ringer — Stanley Randall tolled the afternoon bell. And a very difficult bell to ring it was!

If my memory is not faulty, Mr Austin and I were both members of the Rainham Branch of the St John Ambulance Brigade cadets under the benign control of Wesley P. Gransden of 52 Arden Street, Gillingham. Like Mrs Barrett, Mr Gransden deserved immortality, being one of the finest gentlemen I have ever met. I remember that soon after the war he and his wife Blanche opened their house to a young girl from Holland, Nellie Fokker. Nellie and the Gransdens visited my family in Rainham and in a gesture of friendship I offered her the chance to hold the family pet, the tom cat Tarzan, who had more battle scars than most World War 2 veterans. She shrank back in terror. When I mistakenly persisted in trying to get her to hold Tarzan she replied, 'In war mother and father eat cat'. That brought me down to earth and made me realize that OUR war had been easy in comparison.

John Tubb (Bapchild)

SOLOMON ROAD SCHOOL

Dear Editor,

Just to say how much I enjoyed the article in Action Forum by John Austin. As a former pupil many memories were revived, particularly the canteen hut and the formidable Ma Barrett. Many of my memories of the school have long since gone, but I can see Mrs Barrett now, just as you described her. I remember her sergeant-major voice, which would sometimes let her down by lapsing into a Robin Cook type of squeak until it resumed its full force. I was fascinated by the sight and smell of those long cloth-covered jam roly-poly puddings. I have loved jam

roly-poly ever since! As a small boy those puddings seemed to be about six feet long.

I am sorry the canteen hut has gone now, as it was more important to me than the school itself, about which I can remember little except that my teacher was the long-suffering Miss Mudge, who to us was very, very old, but was probably only in her early twenties. I cannot remember the headmaster's name, though the name Mr Pitcher lingers in my memory as one of my childhood heads. At the age of five I fell in love with one of my classmates named Anne, but alas I was always ignored by her.

Nearly all of my old schools have been pulled down, so at least here is one that still stands, even without the memorable Canteen Hut.

Thanks again for the brilliant article, and for the memories it evoked.

Owen Davis
01634 233101

SOLOMON ROAD CANTEN

Dear Editor,

I was very interested to see the article by Mr Austin in the May edition of Action Forum, which a friend sent to me, about the Solomon Road Canteen. Mr and Mrs Barrett, or Cookie and Pop as we called them, were my parents in law. I married their eldest son in 1940, my husband died a few years ago and all the others of his generation have passed away so I am the last one left, but I have three sons and six grandchildren to carry on the line.

When my husband was away on HMS Resolution, he was a Royal Marine, and I worked at Short Brothers, Cookie used to save me one of her dinners to have when I got home. I am enclosing a photograph (see front page) taken outside the canteen which I thought would be of interest to your readers, it is amazing the likeness Mr Austin captured even after all these years.

Yours sincerely,
Mrs K. Barrett
53 Woodchurch Road
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