

ACTION FORUM

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY FOR RAINHAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

JANUARY/
FEBRUARY 2003
NUMBER 375



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Next Issue: March 1st 2003
Copy Date: Feb 11th Sm Ads Feb 14th
Editorial: Mrs Barbara Mackay Miller,
5 Meresborough Cotts, Tel: 231307.
Advertising: Hamish Mackay Miller,
5 Meresborough Cotts, Tel: 231307.

Editorial

The unseasonably warm weather we have been having recently, particularly over the Christmas period, is playing havoc with our expectations. Blossom we think is early if we see it in late February is already appearing on some ornamental trees and if it were not so wet and marshy I would seriously consider mowing the grass, it will be like a hayfield before Good Friday, my traditional day for a first cut. Much as we say we hate the cold weather we do need at least one decent cold snap to kill off the bugs and pests or we will be overrun next year. So far I have not had to do more than a token scrape of soft ice from my car windscreen in the morning. No doubt having written this it will all change and by the time you are reading my words in two weeks time we will have forgotten all about the mild Christmas and be shivering in an arctic blast.

Our thoughts this month are with children in a much warmer place. Over the last couple of years, since we have reintroduced voluntary door to door delivery, Action Forum has donated the money that was previously paid to a distribution agency to charity including the Kajiado Project, a small locally based organisation that uses all money raised directly for the benefit of people in this poor area of Africa. So far we have given £660 and this month Roger Milton writes to tell you how the latest money has been spent. We are also giving some of the money to help with the repair of St Margaret's and St Matthew's Church roofs, much is still needed by both parishes to complete their work. Over 50 people already assist with the distribution of Action Forum, and we are very grateful to them, but we could still do with more help, so if you have an hour to spare once a month and enjoy walking with a purpose (it is very good exercise out in the fresh air) please do contact me on 231307, or during shop hours on 371591. We have vacancies scattered over the entire distribution area.

If you live in the Wigmore area and would like to open your garden in aid of charity Paul Bellerby (387328) of St Matthew's Church would be pleased to hear from you. Following the successful events in previous years they are again planning a Wigmore Gardens Weekend this summer. If, however, like ours your garden could do with a more consistent loving touch then perhaps we should set aside the weekend at the end of June to go and find out what can be done

with a bit of enthusiasm. Whichever, all money raised will go to a very good cause.

Rather belatedly we wish you all a very happy 2003 and look forward to seeing you again in March until then have a good month.

Correspondence

KNOWLEDGE & NIBBLES

Dear Editor,

The Friends of St Margaret's would like to thank Action Forum for your support in advertising our fund-raising events during 2002 especially Joe Enn's talk on Old Rainham and our somewhat 'different' (but very successful) Curry Evening. However, this year the Friends are beginning with an old favourite, a Knowledge and Nibbles evening on Saturday 22nd February at 7.30pm in the Millennium Centre (entrance via the Cricketers' car park). Up to 10 can be seated at each table. The fee of £6 per head includes one bottle each of red and white wine per table but please bring a bottle of your favourite tipple if you wish. Prior booking is essential as there will be no spare tables on the night. To book, please telephone Lesley on 379796 or Ann on 372680.

Yours sincerely
Kay Jarvis
(Friends Committee)

SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING

Dear Editor,

Now that Christmas is over, perhaps readers feel the need for some gentle and enjoyable exercise. Why not try Scottish Country Dancing, it is fun for people of all ages. Medway Caledonians meet on: Mondays at Bredhurst Village Hall - 1.30 to 3.30pm Thursdays at All Saints' Church Hall, Frindsbury - 8.00 to 10.30pm.

Anyone interested can just turn up or phone Maureen Pope on 01634 230433 for details.

Yours faithfully
M.M. Pope

SAVE THE CHILDREN

Dear Editor,

May I, through Action Forum, thank everyone who attended our Wine and Wisdom evening. Unfortunately, we were unable to accommodate all who wanted to come along. However, over £680 profit was raised on the night which will be used by Save the Children to help support children wherever the need is greatest.

Special thanks are due to Derek and Linda Randall for once again supporting Save the Children and ensuring that the event was both entertaining and successful.

Thank you
Tina Barnard
On behalf of the
Rainham branch of SCF

MEREDALE INFANT SCHOOL

Dear Editor,

Thank you for publishing our letter regarding Meredale Infant School closure in July 2003. Thanks also to Clare Moorcroft for her splendid line drawing of the school and for her permission to use it in our proposed book of memories.

We have had some very interesting articles from past pupils and staff and have learnt many things about the school that we did not know, but which can now be included in our booklet which should be available after Easter from the school. If anyone is interested in receiving a copy please contact the School. There will be a small charge to cover costs.

I hope that everyone involved with the school, both past and present, will take the opportunity to visit the school on Tuesday 8th July between 3.00pm and 8.00pm. There will be an exhibition and refreshments, including a piece of our Commemoration Cake. Everyone is welcome.

Yours sincerely
Eileen James
Headteacher
01634 231405
office@meredale.medway.sch.uk

MEREDALE SCHOOL

Dear Editor,

Like many others I regret the forthcoming closing of Meredale.

My sons Gary and David attended in the 80s, I have many happy memories of school plays and various other activities.

I particularly remember Miss Partridge and Mrs Thomas, the latter's daughter now works as a teacher at Deanwood School in Parkwood.

Yours sincerely
J.Y. Allchin (Mrs)
111 Walsingham Close

OPEN GARDENS

Dear Editor,

Following the success of our Wigmore Gardens Weekends in 1999 and 2001 we are planning to repeat the event in 2003, over the weekend of 28th and 29th June 2003. If any reader would be interested in opening their garden that weekend in aid of our Roof & Renew Appeal, Paul Bellerby (15 Norman

Close, Wigmore 01634 387328) would be pleased to hear from you. Once again we hope to have about 20 gardens open at various times over the weekend.

Yours sincerely
Peter Hagger

VALENTINE'S DANCE

Dear Editor,

St Matthew's Church is holding a Valentines Dance in the Community Centre, Drewery Drive, Wigmore, at 7.30pm on Saturday 15th February with dancing to Dickie Diamond and the Replays. Tickets are £10 including supper and are available from myself (01634 235056). Please bring your own drinks and glasses. All proceeds to St Matthew's Roof & Renew Appeal. Everyone welcome!

Yours sincerely
Peter Hagger

ACTION FORUM DISTRIBUTION

In May last year I appealed for your help with the door to door distribution of Action Forum and we had a tremendous response. This meant that the number of copies I had to do each month came down to a reasonable amount. My aim is to have the entire 20,000 distribution area covered by volunteers so I am then available to fill in for holiday cover and the odd emergency. Inevitably during the year some people have had to drop out and so again I ask for your help. The money we used to pay to a distribution agency is now donated to charity so you are also helping the children of Kamiya School (see the article on the Kajiado Project and our front cover picture) and St Margaret's and St Matthew's churches with donations towards their roof repairs. During 2002 £660 was raised for each of these three projects. The areas that need distributors are scattered over the entire distribution area but specifically we need help in Lower Station Road, Lower Halstow, Hempstead, Mierscourt Road, Parkwood and Wigmore Road. If you are able to spend an hour or so, usually during the first week of each month, helping and ideally are able to be flexible and help in an area away from where you live we would love to hear from you during shop hours at Rainham Bookshop 371591 or at other times on 231307.

Barbara Mackay Miller

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Diary 2003

Keeper: Mrs Christine Smith
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Wigmore
Tel: 233098

No charge is made for Diary entries
Diary Copy Date: 11th February 2003

- January 18th – Medway Folk Dance Club. 7.30 to 10.00pm. United Reformed Church Hall, Balmoral Road, Gillingham.
- January 19th – Medway Towns Footpath Group. Start 10.00am. 5 miles. Riverside Park, Gillingham. Dogs on leads. Contact no. 01634 855522.
- January 19th – Ramblers Association. Start 10.00am. 9.5 miles. Meet in Hadlow Square.
- January 20th – 'Britain and the EU. The Facts' presentation by John Rose, 8.00pm, Prince's Room, Corn Exchange, Rochester. Free Admission.
- January 21st – Gillingham Horticultural Society, Floral Art Group, United Reformed Church Hall, Balmoral Road, Gillingham, 7.30 to 9.00pm. DIY or Tricks of the Trade, ring 234734 for details.
- January 22nd – Wigmore Afternoon Townswomen's Guild. Presentation. Competition: China Flower. 1.45 to 4.15pm. Howard Hall, Woodside, Wigmore.
- January 22nd – Countryside Event. Bird Walk, 11.30am, Riverside Country Park. £1.50 to book on 378987.
- January 22nd – Medway Camcorder Club. Animation Demonstration Hands On: bring camcorders. 7.30pm, Medway Motor Yacht Club, Medway Bridge Marina, Manor Lane, Borstal, Rochester. Contact no. 01634 371570.
- January 23rd – Wigmore Thursday Club. Barbara Letchford – Gone to the Dogs. 2.00pm in St Matthew's Community Centre, Drewery Drive, Wigmore. For people over the age of 50. For further information telephone 235507.
- January 23rd-February 1st – Medway Little Theatre 'A Chorus of Approval' by Alan Ayckbourn, 7.30pm. Box Office 400322.

- January 25th – Instep Dancing. Saturday Social Dance, Rainham School for Girls. Ballroom Latin/Sequence. 8.00 to 11.00pm. Enquiries telephone 01634 363738.
- January 25th – Medway & Maidstone VSO Burns Night Barn Dance, 7.30pm, Chatham Grammar School for Boys, Letchford Avenue, Chatham. Tickets (inc hot supper) £7.50, ring 376608 to book.
- January 26th – Medway Towns Footpath Group. Start 2.00pm. 5 miles. Lenham Village car park. Dogs on leads. Contact no. 01634 374923.
- January 27th – Medway Spinners, Dyers & Weavers Association. Coat Hanger Free Expression Weaving. 7.30 to 9.30pm at the Annexe (Urchins Playgroup) building in Marlborough Road, Gillingham.
- January 28th – Rainham Evening Machine Knitting Club. 8.00 to 10.00pm. The Red Cross Gillingham Centre, 31 Balmoral Road, Gillingham. Contact no. 01634 862673.
- January 29th – Ramblers Association. Start 10.00am. 6 miles. Meet and park in Scotney near Lamberhurst car park.
- January 30th – Wigmore Thursday Club. AGM. (see 23rd Jan).
- January 30th – Gillingham Horticultural Society, 8.00pm, Millennium Centre, talk with slides 'Plants and Flowers'. Alf Hoy. Members £1.50, non members £2.00, details 360624.
- January 31st – Gillingham Recorded Music Society. A look at the musical theatre. 7.15 to 9.15pm, St Augustine's Church Room (top of Rock Avenue), Gillingham.
- February 1st – Medway Folk Dance Club. (see 18th Jan)
- February 1st – Countryside Event, Tree ID Walk, 10.00 to 12 noon, Capstone Farm Park. £1.50, book on 812196.
- February 2nd – Medway Towns Footpath Group. Start 10.00am. 5 miles. Bluebell Hill Picnic Site. No dogs.
- February 2nd – Ramblers Association. Start 10.00am. Meet and park on the road north of Stansted Church. 8 miles.
- February 3rd – Wigmore WRVS Darby & Joan Club,


- Howard Hall, Woodside, 2.00 to 4.00pm. Bingo, raffle, tea and biscuits, over 50s welcome. Ring 362662 for details.
- February 4th – Floral Art Group, 'Craft: Container Making'. (see 21st Jan)
- February 5th – Medway Camcorder Club. Working with a tele-prompter: Demonstration by Peter Snell. (see 22nd Jan)
- February 6th – Wigmore Thursday Club. Slides on the Wild Orchids of Kent by Fred Booth. (see 23rd Jan)
- February 7th – Gillingham Recorded Music Society. Iberian music and its influences. (see 31st Jan)
- February 8th – Instep Dancing. (see 25th Jan)
- February 8th – Medway Little Theatre, Children's Workshop 'Bad Day at Black Frog Creek'. Box Office 400322.
- February 9th – Medway Towns Footpath Group. Start 2.00pm. Brasted – park near zebra crossing. No dogs. 6 miles. Contact no. 01732 841433.
- February 9th – Ramblers Association. Meet and park at Camar Park near Cobham. Start 10.00am. 7 miles.
- February 10th – Medway Spinners, Dyers & Weavers Association. Show and Tell – any craft. (see 27th Jan)
- February 10th – Countryside Event. Birdwatching Cruise. £17.50, pay in advance 378987.
- February 11th – Rainham Evening Machine Knitting Club. (see 28th Jan)
- February 10th – Wigmore WRVS Darby & Joan Club. (see 3rd Feb)
- February 11th – Medway Antique & Collectors' Club, St George Hotel, New Road, Chatham. 7.30pm. 'Old & Rare Books' Paul Minet, details 365861.
- February 12th – Bredhurst WI. Life on a Canal Boat – Mary Herritage. 7.30pm in Bredhurst Village Hall.
- February 13th – Wigmore Thursday Club. Quiz. (see 23rd Jan)
- February 15th – Medway Folk Dance Club. (see 18th Jan)
- February 15th – St Matthew's Community Centre, Drewery Drive, 7.30pm, Valentines Dance to Dickie Diamond and The Replays. BYOD.

- Tickets £10.00 including supper, 235056.
- February 15th – Medway & District HF Holidays Social, Newington Methodist Church Hall. 11.00am to 3.00pm. Speaker, American Lunch, Raffle, entrance 50p, guests welcome.
- February 16th – Medway Towns Footpath Group. Start 10.00am. Cuxton – Bush Road. Turn right at garage. 6 miles. No dogs. Contact no. 01634 710017.
- February 16th – Ramblers Association. Start 10.00am. Meet at Westerham Church. 5 miles.
- February 17th – Countryside Event. Talk, 7.30pm, Riverside Country Park. 'Sustainable Food'. £1.60, book on 378987.
- February 17th – Wigmore WRVS Darby & Joan Club. (see 3rd Feb)
- February 18th – Floral Art Group, 'Romance'. (see 21st Jan)
- February 19th – Wigmore Afternoon Townswomen's Guild. Mr Davis – Medway Tourism. Competition: Animal Ornament. (see 22nd Jan)
- February 19th – Bredhurst Garden Club, Bredhurst Village Hall, 8.00pm. Talk 'Basket Work', Mr D. Knowler, details 233554.
- February 20th – Wigmore Thursday Club. Trading Standards – Alistair Martin, Civil Issues & Con. (see 23rd Jan)
- February 20th – Rainham (Afternoon) Women's Institute, Methodist Church Hall, Wakeley Road, Rainham. 1.45pm, Creating Beautiful Borders, details 372479.
- February 21st – Gillingham Recorded Music Society. 1789 and all that. (see 31st Jan)
- February 22nd – Instep Dancing. (see 25th Jan)
- February 22nd – Channel Theatre Company at Upchurch Village Hall, 8.00pm, 'Spooky Little Girl'. Tickets £5 (£4 concessions) from 231326 or 230526 early January.
- February 22nd – HF Walk, meet 10.15am 'White Horse' close to Cuxton Station, approx 7 miles. Packed lunch. Leader Derek Gray 01474 363024.
- February 22nd – Friends of St Margaret's, 'Knowledge & Nibbles'. 7.30pm, Millennium Centre, 8 to a table, £6 per head includes wine. Book on 379796 or 372680. Cont. on p11


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KAJIADO DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT TRUST

Previous generous donations from Action Forum have been absorbed into the general development fund and it has not been possible to pinpoint exactly where the money has been spent. One of the complaints that I have about large charities is that you do not know what your donation was spent on and therefore we tell people that they can see where their money has gone. This being the case we decided that Action Forum's latest donation should go towards one specific project.

We chose Komiya school near Magadi in the south of the Kajiado District, a very dry area where rainfall is low and temperatures can reach over 40 degrees celsius. The school is currently being constructed by the parents for the education of children too young to walk the 5km or so to the present school. The new school is being constructed with corrugated metal sheets and is at the stage where it could be used if the floors were concreted, until this happens the children are currently taught whilst sitting under a tree about 100mts from the school building.

We decided to buy the books that they needed for the nursery class and purchase a desk and chair for the teacher. The money left over was used to buy cement for the floor, the KDDT will cover the cost of extra cement, sand and labour in addition to providing guttering and a plastic 2,300 ltr water tank. The latest cheque from Action Forum will buy desks, 20 at a cost of £15 each. A display with several pictures of the new school and the children may be seen on the notice board in Rainham Bookshop. Many thanks to the distributors of Action Forum for your continued support of the Kajiado project.

Roger Milton

WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER (Interdenominational)

The Women's World Day of Prayer Movement will celebrate its annual Day of Prayer on Friday 7th March 2003. This year's service comes from Lebanon and the theme of the Service is 'Holy Spirit, Fill Us'.

Lebanon is one of the smallest countries in the Middle East, less than half the size of Wales. It is an ancient land and is mentioned over 70 times in the

Bible. This beautiful country, with its lovely coastal plain, high mountain ranges, temperate climate and famous cedar trees, lies on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The capital is Beirut. Lebanon is bordered to the north and east by Syria and to the south by Israel.

Because of its strategic position, Lebanon has always been at the centre of world events - a passageway for all the great conquerors and their armies throughout history. Traditionally it has been a land of refuge and over the centuries became a melting pot of ethnic, cultural and religious groups, many of whom were Christian. Much of the country bears the scars of recent civil war and its shattered economy is not yet rebuilt. Spending power has become limited, and many young people have moved to the cities in search of better job opportunities.

Just as God has blessed Lebanon with natural beauty, so this is reflected in the lives of the people. Despite all that has happened the Christians have held on to their faith. It is from this background that the women of Lebanon urge us to take up the cry of 'Holy Spirit, Fill Us' and encourage us to reach out to God for His enabling power in all circumstances.

Women, men, children, and young people from many different backgrounds and in more than 180 countries will be celebrating this Day of Prayer. May we invite you to join in our service, 7.30pm at St Margaret's Church, Rainham.

Scottish Country Dancing, Medway Caledonians meet each Monday 1.30 to 3.30pm, Bredhurst Village Hall and each Thursday 8.00 to 10.30pm, All Saints' Church Hall, Frindsbury. Details from Maureen Pope, 230433.

Uppbury Manor Barn Dance Club meet every Thursday at Woodlands Road, Gillingham, 7.30 to 9.30pm. Beginners welcome, singles or couples. Ring 362446 for information.

Wigmore WRVS Darby & Joan Club meets at the Howard Hall, Woodside, Wigmore, from 2.00 to 4.00pm on Mondays. We mostly play bingo, have a raffle and there is a break for a cup of tea and biscuits. People over the age of 50 are welcome and transport can sometimes be arranged. Ring 362662

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Nature Notes

NATURE NOTES FOR DECEMBER

A favourite place of Gillingham residents at which to walk off the excesses of Christmas is undoubtedly the Riverside Country Park. Mote Park serves as a place where those who live in Maidstone can get some fresh air and exercise. The two parks are quite different. The former consists of salt marshes alongside a tidal river whereas the latter is traditional parkland complete with freshwater lake.

In December I took a walk in Mote Park, approaching it via Mote Avenue which is lined with lime trees. Once inside the park gates I drove down a sunken lane between rows of beech trees. In his book 'Meetings with Remarkable Trees' Thomas Pakenham said that when God made the beech He created an architectural masterpiece, joining in one design the strongest form with the most delicate detail. Yet somehow He forgot to put in the foundations. Notorious for its shallow roots, the beech rarely lives for more than 200 years. Pakenham notes, however, that old beech trees preserve the smooth skin of their youth, making it irresistible to the carvings of poets and lovers.

I left my car in the main car park among some oak trees. There was a large flock of carrion crows feeding on the adjoining football pitches. An old saying claims that if you see a flock of crows they are rooks and if you see a solitary rook it is a crow. That old adage no longer holds true, if ever it did. The number of crows has increased enormously over the past few years and large flocks can be seen on open spaces everywhere including, for example, Blackheath on the edge of London. Like magpies, they are no longer shot by gamekeepers.

I dropped down the sloping footpath to the head of the lake. The latter was created in the eighteenth century by the damming of the little River Len. The area by the boat house is a popular spot from which to fish and to feed the waterfowl. During my visit I noted mute swan, coot, moorhen, pochard, mallard, tufted duck, black headed gull and a solitary great crested grebe.

I headed along the north side of the lake towards Mote House. The main trees in the parkland appeared to be oak but I also noticed horse chestnut, lime, ash, beech and sweet chestnut. Blue tits and chaffinches were attracted to fallen beech masts and squirrels to the remains of the sweet chestnuts. The dreys of squirrels and the nests of magpies and carrion crows were easily seen now that the leaves of the trees have fallen.

At the edge of the lake grew alder, weeping willow, grey willow and sallow. The sun picked out the yellowish brown pendulous twigs of the weeping willow. Grey willow and sallow belong to a group of trees collectively known as pussy willows. Their catkins will begin to expand in late winter and early spring and the flowering shoots were once used to decorate churches on Palm Sunday.

Holly, wild rose and hawthorn berries were very much in evidence and I saw a number of mistle thrushes feeding on the berries. Doubtless redwings and fieldfares will also seek them out once they – and the starlings – have polished off the apples in the surrounding orchards.

Mote House was built in the eighteenth century by the Earl of Romney, one time Lord Lieutenant of Kent. It is constructed of yellow brick and faced with ashlar at the front of the house. It was last used as a Cheshire Home and is now empty. From its elevated position one has a good view of Mote Park, the lake and the distant centre of Maidstone.

I retraced my steps to The Café in the Park next to the main car park. As I climbed from the dam of the lake towards the café I noticed a mixed flock of blue and long tailed tits in a group of alder trees.

Joe Ennis

COUNCIL ACQUIRES EAST HOATH WOOD

A recent newspaper report indicated that 25 acres of East Hoath Wood is to be 'transferred' to Medway Council on April 1st 2003. Although the area has been available for use by residents for as long as I can remember, the report indicates that safety work and fencing etc costing in the region of £60,000 is necessary before the woods can be used for recreational purposes.

It is said that the woodland, mainly sweet chestnut and oak, supplied wood for shipbuilding as far back as Nelson's time and although I cannot confirm that, it is obvious that this area, together with much of the land in the vicinity, was owned by the War Department a century ago. East Hoath Wood is bounded on one side by Hoath Lane, and to the east by the gardens in Edwin Road. The path, leading from Durham Road which comes out opposite the stile giving access to the Darland Banks, has become a very popular walk over the years. I don't remember these woods containing very large trees like those in the Parkwood area, where there were some magnificent oaks and beeches, but then my woodland roaming ended 70 years ago. I imagine that Hoath Wood, like most others, was regularly coppiced because chestnut was so useful and profitable as a crop for the purpose of chestnut fencing, which was later superseded by plastic covered chain-link wire. I remember three wood yards in the Rainham area alone; there was Stan Huggins in Wakeley Road, Alf Warner in Maidstone Road and then Glovers in the Wigmore/Maidstone Road area, and until very recently Woods in Bredhurst. I must check to see if 'Woodreeve Cottage' is still in the loop section of Mierscourt Road.

The boundary between the Milton Rural District Council's area and Gillingham ran south from the A2 along the line of the rear garden fences on the western side of Edwin Road and it then formed the ancient boundary between East Hoath Wood and Mark Oak Wood. This was the parliamentary boundary when Rainham was part of the Faversham Division and Adam Maitland was our MP. Rainham's Parish Council administered the area from the river to Bredhurst. This boundary line at Rainham Mark turned sharply westward for about 200 yards from near the Hop and Vine public house and then turned northward to the river, running roughly parallel with Twydall Lane. I believe that this was the boundary which divided 'Men of Kent' from 'Kentish Men', for Edward Hasted, in his description of Rainham in 1798, says 'the whole of this parish is in the division of East Kent which begins here and the adjoining parish of Gillingham westward is wholly in that of West Kent'. It has always been my view that this is

the origin of 'Men of Kent' and 'Kentish Men', although it was necessary to identify it more easily so the River Medway was chosen as the boundary. The 1908 map clearly shows that the land immediately to the east of Hoath Lane back to the boundary line was cleared, presumably by the War Department, up to the point roughly where the present factories cease and much of the remaining area including Edwin Road, Marshall Road and all of the area to the south, was woodland. An area of Platters Farm, which is reached by the track immediately opposite the top of Pump Lane on the A2, had been cleared and was then used as orchard land.

I presume that East Hoath Wood was purchased by the Health Authority soon after its creation in 1947 when it was obvious that the area would need a new district hospital. Nothing happened for many years, but in the early 1960s some of us in local government realised that St Bart's and All Saints' hospitals were totally incapable of serving the area in a satisfactory manner, so we pressed for the use of the Royal Naval hospital which had then been recently vacated. This is now known as the Medway Maritime hospital and following the recent extensions is apparently considered to be adequate as the permanent district hospital, so the site at East Hoath Wood is surplus to requirements. Some time ago the Regional Health Authority applied for permission to develop the area for housing, but planning permission was refused. I presume that they have now decided to unload an area which has become a liability and probably inadequate for a district hospital anyway.

I notice on reference to the plan that the wedge type area between Hempstead Hill and Hoath Lane was at the early part of the last century called 'The Scrubs', which is new to me. This area too, to the best of my knowledge, is also owned by the Health Authority as it was the site of the Alexandra hospital for infectious diseases, which although little used had quite a history. Infectious diseases were very prevalent in the early part of the 1900s and in 1887 a small isolation hospital was built on the site now occupied by the Municipal Buildings in Canterbury Street, Gillingham. Smallpox was one of those diseases which many people feared and most children

Cont. on p11

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COUNCIL ACQUIRES EAST HOATH WOOD

Cont. from p9

were vaccinated on the arm and we bear marks to this day, because the small vaccination has grown until some are now about two inches across. However, in 1901 a man named Mallen was visiting the area and contracted smallpox which caused consternation because they did not wish to keep him at the newly created isolation hospital in Gillingham and sent him out to a caravan and tents in the Hempstead area where the population was still sparse. Unfortunately, Mallen and several others died from the particular outbreak, and it became apparent that a more permanent isolation hospital was necessary for Gillingham. Scarlet fever and diphtheria were very common at the time and Rainham patients needing hospitalisation were sent to Keycol hospital as we were still part of the Milton Rural District Council's area. The triangular piece of land between Hoath Lane and Hempstead Hill which comes to a point near the roundabout was owned by Mr R. Batchelor, the artesian well engineer who lived at Darland House, and he donated the land to the Gillingham Local Board (the predecessors of the Council) on the condition that it was used for health purposes and the isolation hospital was named Alexandra. I presume that the covenant has restricted its use, which is possibly why it has remained unoccupied and to some extent derelict, with a supporting wall down Hempstead Hill which may become a liability for its maintenance. The hospital was erected on the

northern side of the road which went from Hoath Lane down to the bottom of Hempstead Hill a long time before the tunnel was built. This was a prefabricated metal hospital (corrugated iron) purchased from Humphries Isolation Hospitals at Knightsbridge. It was opened in 1902 and closed in 1940 when it was prepared for emergency use during the war, but I understand was never used. Greens of Brompton demolished the hospital in the 1970s and the land seems to have been unattended since. It may be that the welcome donation by Mr Batchelor 100 years ago is now a liability to the Regional Health Authority.

Freddie Cooper

Diary 2003

February 23rd — Medway Towns Footpath Group.

Start 10.00am, Brenchley car park — opp Church.
 Dogs on leads. 6 miles.

February 23rd — Indoor Book Fair, Upchurch Village Hall. £7 per stall, reservations only. All welcome. Stall holders 10.00am to 2.00pm. Public 10.30am to 1.30pm. To reserve a stall telephone Tina 01634 234395 or Lynne 01634 239304.

February 23rd — Ramblers Association. Start 10.00am. Meet and park at the north end of Doddington. 7 mile walk.

February 24th — Medway Spinners, Dyers & Weavers Association. Spinning. (see 27th Jan)

February 24th — Countryside Event. Children's Event. Riverside Country Park, 10.30 to 12 noon. £1.50, book on 378987.

February 24th — Wigmore WRVS Darby & Joan Club. (see 3rd Feb)

February 25th — Rainham Evening Machine Knitting Club. (see 28th Jan)

February 26th — Ramblers Association. Start 10.00am. Meet and park in car park in Cobham Village Centre. 6.5 mile walk.

February 26th — Gillingham Horticultural Society 'Quiz Night', 8.00pm, Lloyds Social Club, Featherby Road. Tables of 6, £4 per person. Sausage & Chip supper included, proceeds for charity, details from Joyce 360624. Cont. on p13

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Diary 2003

February 27th - Wigmore Thursday Club. Service,
Sales Stall and Singalong. (see 23rd Jan)
February 27th - Countryside Event, Capstone Farm
Park, 10.00 to 12 noon. £1.50, book on 812196.
February 28th - The Medway Geographical Society.
Four Seasons Walk through Kent - Mr C. Wade.
7.30 to 9.00pm, Adult Education Centre, Green
Street, Gillingham.
March 1st - Countryside Event. Kite Making
Workshop, £1.50, book on 378987.
March 1st - New Exhibition Rainham Bookshop
Gallery to 29th March.
March 1st - City of Rochester Symphony Orchestra,
7.30pm Central Theatre, Chatham. Overture 'The
Thieving Magpie' - Rossini and Piano Concerto
No. 2 in C minor Op. 18 - Rachmaninov.
Box Office 403868.
March 2nd - Medway Towns Footpath Group. Start
10.00am, Bluebell Hill Picnic Site. Dogs on leads.
6 mile walk. Contact no. 01634 865583.
March 2nd - Ramblers Association. Start 10.00am.
Meet at Sheldwich Lees and park in Green
opposite. 8 mile walk.
March 3rd - Medway Spinners, Dyers & Weavers
Association. Carole - Ribbon Weaving.
(see 27th Jan)
March 3rd - Wigmore WRVS Darby & Joan Club.
(see 3rd Feb)

March 4th - Floral Art Group, 'Simplicity'.
(see 21st Jan)

March 5th - Medway Camcorder Club. How a
Website is devised: with Graeme Whippy.
(see 22nd Jan)

March 6th - Wigmore Thursday Club. Mr Morgan -
Talk on growing Geraniums and Fuchsias.
(see 23rd Jan)

March 7th - Gillingham Recorded Music Society.
The Four Seasons. (see 31st Jan)

March 7th - Women's World Day of Prayer. 'Holy
Spirit, Fill Us'. 7.30pm St Margaret's Church,
Rainham, all welcome.

March 8th - Instep Dancing. (see 25th Jan)

March 8th - HF Walk. Meet 10.30am free car park
opposite 'Man on Wheels', Rainham, approx 6
miles to Queendown Warren, dry packed lunch.

March 9th - Medway Towns Footpath Group. Start
10.00am, Teynham Rail Station. No Dogs.
5 mile walk. Contact no. 01795 535941.

March 9th - Ramblers Association. Start 10.00am.
Meet at Chequers PH in Loose. 6 mile walk.

March 10th - Medway Spinners, Dyers & Weavers
Association. 'Warping a Loom'. (see 27th Jan)

March 12th - Ramblers Association. Start 10.00am.
Meet and park in Hollingbourne Rail Station.
7.5 mile walk.

March 13th-22nd - Medway Little Theatre, 'The
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- Private Chapels of Rest
- Monumental Masons
- Pre-arranged Funeral Plans
- Horse Drawn Hearse available

01634 373111

130 High Street, Rainham
Kent ME8 8AR

01634 855558

127 Watling Street
Gillingham, Kent ME7 2YY
Car parking available

01634 408777

25 New Road, Chatham
Kent ME4 4QJ
Car parking available

