

ACTION FORUM

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY FOR RAINHAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

JANUARY /
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NUMBER 517



A picture, taken in 1905, of The Mulberry Tree Inn on the Lower Rainham Road just before the Yokosuka Way roundabout. According to the Kent History Forum The Mulberry Tree beer house opened before 1872, and got its name from a Mulberry Tree that grew in the garden. It was probably opened to serve men building forts in the area. Before the sea wall was built on the nearby river bank the pub often flooded at spring tides. When it closed in 1973 it was the last beer house in the area. The Mulberry Tree was never licensed to sell spirits it was an ale house only. See the letter on page 2 'Sharps Green Mission'.

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Editorial

Having just spent a few days in Cheshire I begin to realise how fortunate we are living in the south of England. It was dark by 4.15pm and sunrise was not until 8.38am and that at a location a mere three hour train journey north. No wonder there is always much protest from Scotland and the north of England when permanent 'summer time' throughout the UK is promoted. But it is not only for the longer hours of daylight we are blessed this year – the further from London the train travelled the wetter the ground became. Acres of farm land have become lakes, rivers and streams are swollen to form wide meandering ribbons across the fields and even the canals seem to be almost up to the brink. And the rain keeps falling. In some places sheep still grazed surrounded by muddy lakes, but they appeared to be two tone versions of the normal animal, dirty white fleeces on their backs and muddy brown legs and tummies from sitting down on the sodden earth. I normally enjoy walking to the local town along a pleasant stream side footpath. I am in Cheshire for my five weekly baby sitting duty and it is the only way I can get the very determined two year old to sleep by taking her out in the pushchair - I am sure other grandparents amongst you will recognise the problem! On this visit it was impossible, we would have been wading through inches deep mud so I had to find different routes on proper paved paths, not nearly as enjoyable a walk with traffic roaring past.

The years roll by so quickly it does not seem possible it is 2016 already – it only seems yesterday we were all celebrating the turn of the century and the fact we had not all been wiped out by the 'millennium bug'. But here we are and commemorating the hundred years since that terrible year 1916. A war that had begun eighteen months before with such optimism and certainty that it would be short lived was bogged down in awful trench warfare on the battlefields of France. I am sure we will regularly be marking the anniversaries of those terrible battles and the horrific loss of life throughout 2016. Very few are still alive who can remember the First World War but many still have strong memories of the second conflict which began only twenty one years later. However they are now well past retirement age and consequently the committee of the local Evacuees Club have decide, as have many other veteran organisations, to finish with a

flourish whilst the members could still enjoy the proceedings hence the last meeting of FAME which phoenixed from MERG (Medway Evacuees Reunion Group) was held in November after a 16 year history. (See page 3.) A sad but probably sensible decision. For information of other clubs you can still join do please read on, many are listed in our Diary and you will be very welcome at any of the meetings. Until we see you again at the beginning of March do have a good month – the rain has to stop sometime soon, still at least it is not the white stuff!

Correspondence

SHARPS GREEN MISSION

Dear Editor

My father was born in Mulberrytree Cottages, and my family lived in Grange Road near Ladds Corner, so we know the area well, but typically, have no photos. All I can offer is a few memories, as my two sisters and I attended Sunday School at the Sharps Green Mission in the early 1950's, as did quite a few children from the vicinity of Ladds Corner - the Hewlett boys and Bowman girls among them. At that time classes were taken by Miss Lewis, a grey haired lady who was a teacher at Woodlands Secondary School. We would each be given a sticker with a picture and Bible verse referring to the subject of the morning's lesson. My sister recalls that children's lessons were held in the side room of the building, and that we went into the chapel part for special events - on Mother's Day we would receive a daffodil to take home. The chapel had a carpet down the middle and an altar cloth embroidered by Joan Stedman, the owner of Grange Farm, who had connections with St Mary's Gillingham, the mother church for the mission. My sister also remembers going to a weekday club there, run by Marie Perry. On one occasion, nobody arrived with a key to unlock the building, so one of the boys, probably Eric Hewlett, ran all the way to an address near Plantation Road for the key, ran back, then had to recover - flaked out from the effort. My sisters and I walked home from Sunday School, along the Lower Rainham Road then up Lower Eastcourt Lane by Mudge's Farm, with its cows in the barns around the farmyard, now converted into residences. At the entrance to the yard was a very large (to my young eyes) smooth stone with bowl shaped hollows worn into it - the sort of object that sticks in the memory, and that I just had to examine each time we passed it.

On one Sunday morning, we reached Ladds Corner, and were frightened to see what to us was a rampaging bull in the road - and my eldest sister was wearing a red coat! Until it was ushered away, we took refuge in the front garden of the nearest house, which would have afforded little protection, as the garden wall was barely more than a foot high!

The Mission building was used by adults on some evenings - my aunt Flo Burgess (of Mulberrytree

Cottages) went to whist drives there, along with others from the Grange/Ladds Corner/Lower Twydall area. In those days, Grange was a country hamlet between the towns of Gillingham and Rainham. Many of the residents were longstanding, and related to each other by birth or marriage. The older folk regarded themselves as living in Grange, aware of its links to the river (it was once a Cinque Port), and felt quite separate from the towns. The population was quite small, so it was commendable that Twydall Mission provided a service to the locality at a time when the only other amenities were probably the Mulberrytree and Hastings Arms at one end, and the Three Mariners at the other.

After the destruction of the building the only remains for some years was the low wall along the site beside the lane to Sharps Green. The gap through which we entered still had a metal arch over it, with a light fitting at the apex. There is now no sign of the wall or the arch beneath the undergrowth.

Yours sincerely
Ron Norwood

THE FINAL FAREWELL - WWII EVACUEES

Dear Editor,

On 11th November the WWII Medway Evacuees club held its last meeting in the St Margaret's Millennium Centre, attended by special guest Councillor Barry Kemp, the Mayor of Medway. Catering was provided by Sunflower Catering and the entertainment by that very excellent local vocalist Trevor Styles. The club "Families and Associates of Medway Evacuees (FAME)" was first formed in 2011, some three months after its forerunner, "Medway Evacuees Reunion Group (MERG)", closed its doors. The latter was established in 1999 and had a very successful run of 11 years, thanks to a hard working committee, but eventually a lack of volunteer committee members made it impossible to continue. FAME established itself with about 120 of the original members, under a new name and with a new committee.

It was always considered that the age of members would be a stumbling block in coming years. Hence, it was hoped that widening the scope of membership, by opening it up to family members and those people interested in evacuation, would extend its life. For a couple of years, partly thanks to Action Forum for publishing a letter in May 2013 this happened.

However the age of the evacuee members has caught

up with us and, with a dwindling membership, it was considered by the committee to 'go out with a flourish rather than simply fade away with a whimper'. So, to all those who supported FAME, to those 'leading lights' who established the first club in 1999 and to the members of the committee, a big Thank You. The motto of FAME was "Renewing old friendships and building new ones, which is exactly what happened during the past 16 years or so. That said, the members bid you all a final farewell.

Bob Davis
Titular Chairman FAME

INDIAN CHARITY

Dear Editor

Could we firstly thank Action Forum for the very generous donation of £1000 to our charity. It was most unexpected but very gratefully received, so many, many thanks.

We would also like to thank all the readers who have supported us over the last year by attending our quiz night, open garden and coffee mornings. Also for the many donations received of either money or goods, which went for auction or to the boot fair. Also Sam and his friends for raising sponsorship by competing in Tough Mudder last summer. The total raised to date is £4486.81 which will, we have been informed, be spent on a new kitchen for the Boys Orphanage. We couldn't have done it without the support so heartfelt thanks to all you wonderful people,

Marilyn & Sandra
sandracolyer@hotmail.co.uk

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Diary 2016

No charge is made for Diary entries
Copy should be in writing either by email to
af@thenet.uk.net or 5 Meresborough Cottages,
Meresborough, Gillingham, Kent ME8 8PP

Diary Copy Date: February 23rd 2016

January 16th - Beekeeping Course 10.00am to 12noon for
10 weeks, Rainham Cricket Club, Berengrave Lane,
details 01634 233748 or patclare89@me.com
January 16th - Medway Folk Dance Club, United
Reformed Church Hall, Balmoral Road, Gillingham
7.30 - 10.00pm, new & experienced dancers welcome,
with or without partner, ring 366189 or 388546
January 17th - Medway Towns Footpaths Group,
10.00am Meet John Williams 01622 764821 07977
614033 Shipbourne Opposite Church & Chaser Inn
GR591523 TN11 9PE for a 5.5 mile walk via Ightham
Mote & Fairlawne Estate, hilly with road, field, grass,
woodland & hard tracks 15 Stiles. No dogs
January 17th - Medway Ramblers Walk, 10.00am meet
Simon/Mandy, simonellwood@hotmail.com White
Hart Pub, Cuxton, (not in Pub Car Park). TQ712667
ME2 1AB for a 12.5 mile moderate walk with at least
two steep climbs. Bring packed lunch, Pub at end.
January 17th - Medway Ramblers Walk, 10.00am meet
Jan and Sue, susanwhiteoak@talktalk.net West Malling
car park behind Tesco's. TQ680576 ME19 6NA for a
4.5 mile leisurely scenic route, could be muddy walking
by stream. Cafes and pubs in town afterwards.
January 18th - Medway Scrabble Club, alternate
Mondays, 2.00 - 4.30pm, St Stephens Church Hall,
Maidstone Road, Chatham, new members welcome,
details 01634 230500
January 19th - The RSPB Medway Local Group Talk,
Parkwood Community Centre, 7.30 - 9.45pm £3.50.
The Farne Islands - Michael Walter. For Walks see
www.rspb.org.uk/groups/medway.
January 19th - GHS Floral Art Group, United Reformed
Church (rear hall) Balmoral Road, Gillingham, 7.30pm,
'Burns Night' - Interpretative arrangement. New
members welcome, first visit free, no experience
needed, for details contact Kaye Buss 01634 232998 or
email kayebuss@btinternet.com
January 20th - Bredhurst Garden Club, 7.30pm, Village
Hall, Jacqui Aviolet - Talk on 'Nuts' & Hyacinth Show,
New Members Welcome, 01634 233554 for details

January 20th - RainARA, 442 Club, Featherby Road,
Rainham, Talk on "The Trials and Tribulations of a
Tour Guide" by Paddy Earp, Members only, Details
kentsoftent@tiscali.co.uk or 01634 373596
January 21st - Hempstead Leisure Club, Whist, board
games tea and chat Village Hall behind the Church 2.00
- 4.00pm. New members welcome. 01634 366907
January 21st - Wigmore Thursday Club, St Matthew's
Community Centre, 2.00pm, Weird Variety Acts, Paul
Harris, for over 50s, ring 01634 234712 for details.
January 21st - Rainham Women's Institute, 1.45 - 4.00pm.
Wakeley Hall, Oast House Community Centre, Granary
Close, Speaker on "Coastguard Services". Visitors
welcome for small entry charge Details 01634 366276
January 22nd - Rainham Bereavement Friendship Group,
Millennium Centre, Rainham, every Friday 9.45am to
help those who have lost a loved one. Join us for a
cuppa and chat, ring Julie 01634 364309.
January 22nd - Hempstara Whist Afternoons, 1.30pm,
Scout Hut, Dukes Meadow Drive Hempstead. Whist
Players all abilities are welcome, Partner is not required
For details please call Eunice on 01634 231664
January 22nd - Medway Geographical Society, Byron
Road Primary School, Gillingham ME7 5XX 7.30 -
9.00pm, 'Great Wall of China Walk' - Claire Bennett,
Everyone welcome please come on the evening or ring
Lorna Bailey 01634 572139
January 24th - Medway Towns Footpaths Group,
10.00am, Meet John Trebill 01634 244045
Wateringbury Station GR692528 ME18 5EA for a 4
mile fairly flat walk - along the Medway Valley Walk.
Could be muddy at this time of year, No dogs
January 24th - Medway Ramblers Walk, 10.00am meet
Jim 07807 896995, lewislad@hotmail.com in car park
just before entering Selling. TR037564 ME13 9RG for
a 5.5 mile leisurely circular walk, en route are ancient
churches and historic houses. The climax is Perry
Wood once the haunt of Mesolithic man. Pub at end.

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January 26th - Rainbow Whist Drive, Bredhurst Village
Hall Hurstwood Road, 7.30pm, partner not needed and
all whist players are welcome, Details 01634 610364
January 27th - Gillingham Horticultural Society 7.30pm
United Reformed Church Hall, Balmoral Road,
Gillingham. The speaker is from Blind Veterans UK
our charity for 2015, cheque presentation will be made.
Members £2, non members £3 includes refreshments.
All welcome. Details contact Janet 01634 852519.
January 27th - All Saints Women's Fellowship,
Hempstead Village Hall, 8.00pm, The Preservers: Anna
Marie Lawrence, details Rhonda Peck 07951 629444
January 28th - UpARA Outing - Sikh Guru Nanak,
Gravesend, New Members Welcome, for details email
Chairman David Powell davidrpowell5@hotmail.co.uk
January 28th - Hempstead Leisure Club, Colouring for
Relaxation, games etc., (see 21st Jan)
January 28th - Wigmore Thursday Club, AGM (21st Jan)
January 28th - Rainham & District Dolls' House and
Miniaturist Group, AGM, 7.30pm, Howard Memorial
Hall, Woodside, all welcome, more details from Sylvia
Wildridge 01634 312038.
January 30th - Medway Folk Dance Club, (see 16th Jan)
January 31st - Medway Ramblers Walk, 10.00am meet
Heather 07887 750881, Chilham car park off Taylor's
Hill. Parking free, toilets available TR068535 CT4 8BZ
for a 6.25 mile leisurely walk Pubs in Chilham for
lunch at end - may need booking. Bring a picnic
January 31st - Medway Towns Footpaths Group,
10.00am, Meet Lindsay Floyd / Andy Boorman 07743
702049 07881 933358 GR015614 ME13 7JL
Faversham, West Street. Limited roadside parking for
a 4.5 mile mainly flat walk. Expect mud. No dogs
February 1st - 29th - Art Exhibition by John K Austin,
Rainham Library, normal hours, paintings for sale.
February 1st - Medway Scrabble Club, (see 18th Jan)
February 2nd - Rainham Horticultural Society, 7.30pm
Rainham Cricket Club, Berengrave Lane. Members'
Talks: Bonsai, Fuchsias, Pruning, New members
welcome, ring 366276 for details.
February 4th - Hempstead Leisure Club, "Cats protection"
talk by Louise Bayer (see 21st Jan)
February 5th - UpARA, Walk, 10.00am, New Members
Welcome, For details email Chairman David Powell
davidrpowell5@hotmail.co.uk
February 5th - Games Afternoon, 2.00 - 4.00pm, Lower
Halstow Memorial Hall, £1.50, All welcome

February 5th - Hempstara Whist Afternoons, (22nd Jan)
February 5th - An evening with Sunny Ormonde (Lilian
Bellamy) in Radio 4's 'The Archers', Oast House
Theatre, Rainham Curtain up 8.00pm. Tickets £12 from
0844 8793224 or www.oasthousetheatre.co.uk
February 7th - Medway Ramblers Walk, 10.00am meet
Jim, jimbus46@btinternet.com Harrietsham village
hall car park. TQ873529 ME17 1BZ for an 8 mile
leisurely easy walk with a couple of inclines. Bring
picnic lunch for midway break, pub at end.
February 7th - Medway Towns Footpaths Group,
10.00am, Meet Roger Norman 01634 232404 /
07941965272 Penenden Heath car park. GR 772573
ME14 2DH for a 6 mile Maidstone walk. Mostly flat,
no stiles, one short steep slope. Short section of town
walking. Steps over road bridge. No dogs
February 8th - Rainham Bereavement Friendship Group,
Millennium Centre, Rainham meets 2nd Monday
evening each month to help those still in employment
who have lost a loved one. Join us for a cuppa and chat,
ring Julie 01634 364309.
February 8th - Concert Medway Organ & Keyboard Club
Parkwood Community Centre, Rainham, 7.30pm,
Organist - Pete Shaw, Brian Leonard 01634 234694
February 9th - Fuchsia and Pelargonium Society, 7.30pm,
Rainham School for Girls, Steve Pendleton - 'Blinded
on Duty' An ex service man talks about his life,
Members £1, Non members £1.50, All Welcome,
details ring 01634 852519
February 9th - Rainbow Whist Drive, (see 26th Jan)
February 10th - 5th Rainham North Guides celebrate their
40th birthday, 7.00 to 8.30pm, Riverside Primary
School, Wakeley Road, Rainham. Memories to share,
and/or would like to come to the party please contact
Mrs Paula Sharp at paulajsharp1@gmail.com
February 10th - All Saints Women's Fellowship,
Bumbleberry Quilting Studio: Sandra Rocco, (27th Jan)
February 11th - Hempstead Leisure Club, Whist, board
games tea and chat (see 21st Jan)
February 11th - Wigmore Thursday Club, Collection of
Annual Subscriptions and table games (see 21st Jan)
February 12th - UpARA, Monthly Meetings, Upchurch
Village Hall, 2.00pm, Guests £2, (see 5th Feb)
February 12th - Gillingham and Rainham Local History
Society, 7.15pm, Byron Road School, Queen Victoria -
Anne Carter, details Ron Baker 01634 854982

Continued on Page 11

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RAINHAM FLOWER CLUB

As from January 2016 our club will be meeting at
St Matthews Church Hall, Drewery Drive, Wigmore.
Meetings start 7.30pm second Monday each month.
We are looking forward to meeting up with our
current members in the new venue and would
welcome new members, beginners or experienced.
For details ring **01634 864572** or see
www.rainhamflowerclub.co.uk

ART EXHIBITION

John K Austin will be holding an Art Exhibition at
Rainham Library, during normal opening hours,
throughout the month of February, paintings will
be on show and for sale.

AN EVENING WITH SUNNY ORMONDE
Oast House Theatre, Rainham

Friday 5th February, 8.00pm, Tickets £12

Sunny has been playing the "outrageous and raunchy
Lilian Bellamy" in Radio 4's The Archers for the
past 15 years and has become one of the listener's
most favourite characters! Sunny will provide an
evening of anecdotes, banter, and favourite pieces
from her long and distinguished acting career.

Box Office on 0844 8793224 or on-line
www.oasthousetheatre.co.uk

LADIES PAMPER EVENING
Medway Asthma Self Help (MASH)
Gillingham Golf Club

Friday 26th February from 6.00pm

Tickets are £3 in advance or £4 on the door.
Come along and indulge in a range of pampering
treatments including massage, reflexology and
manicure from as little as £5 per treatment (payment
direct to stall holders) and at the same time help raise
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To pre-book entry tickets or if you are interested in
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or **medwayasthmahelp@btconnect.com**

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WINE AND WISDOM EVENT
Saturday February 27th, 7.30pm,
St Matthew's Community Centre
Drewery Drive, Wigmore ME8 ONX

Book a table for 6-8 people at £5 per person
Bring your own drinks and nibbles
Phone **01634 387793** or **01634 387425**

BROMPTON HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP
Wednesday 2nd March 7.00pm
RE Museum, King Arthur Road, Gillingham,
Talk: The Chatham Scandal – Prostitution in
Victorian Medway. Join Brian Joyce and the
Brompton History Research Group, as this
fascinating side of the Medway Towns during the
19th century is brought to life - the women and
brothel keepers, the pubs, the policemen and the
enforcement of controversial new legislation.
Tickets £5. Book **bhrgbookings@gmail.com**

HAYFEVER BY NOEL COWARD
Oast House Theatre, Rainham

March 10.11.12.17.18.19 Curtain up at 8.00pm.
Hay Fever, one of the best-loved of all Coward's
plays, first performed June 1925,
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Nature Notes

NATURE NOTES FOR DECEMBER

It was just before Christmas Eve of last year that I visited the Isle of Harty, which is part of the larger Isle of Sheppey. I took the flyover bridge across The Swale and headed for Leysdown-on-Sea, but then turned right at the sign for Harty Ferry Inn. I paused on the high ground near Capel Hill farm. From my elevated position I could see most of the Isle of Harty, a short stretch of The Swale and, on the horizon, the low, grey line of the North Downs. Wheat and oil seed rape are grown on the higher ground of Harty, whilst beef cattle and sheep are grazed on the low lying marshes. Below me was Capel Fleet which separates the Isle of Harty from the rest of Sheppey. It is one of the best places in the country at which to see over-wintering birds of prey. At dusk, the Fleet offers the spectacle of marsh and hen harriers gathering for their large, communal winter roost in reed beds, which they often share with merlins. To see so many raptors in one place, at the same time, is one of the country's great natural winter marvels. I recommenced my journey downhill towards Capel Fleet and along the narrow road towards Harty Ferry. I stopped again at Pump Hill where there is a specially constructed viewing mound, overlooking the reed beds where the raptors roost. I would be returning to Pump Hill at dusk. There were a couple of seasoned bird watchers on the mound, both well wrapped up and each standing behind a telescope on a tripod. Upon enquiring what was to be seen, I was directed towards a merlin on top of a hawthorn bush, a group of seven cranes feeding on the edge of a field and a rough legged buzzard sitting on a post. The latter bird would be spending its winter in this country and would have bred above the Arctic Circle, where it would have been strongly dependant on lemmings. Here, it would be feeding mainly on rabbits and small mammals such as voles. Soon after I arrived, the rough legged buzzard was mobbed by a resident common buzzard and driven off. Having bidden goodbye to my fellow bird watchers, I headed for the parish church of St Thomas, Harty. One authoritative writer has described it as the remotest church in Kent. On the notice board inside the porch was a poster advertising a Christmas Eve Eucharist at 8pm. "Always a Popular Service" the poster noted. The church was decorated with holly and ivy and

would be lit, during the service, by oil lamps and candles. From the high ground of the graveyard there are views down the coast, past Whitstable and Herne Bay and as far as the twin towers of the former Reculver Church. As I left, a robin sang a melancholy song from its perch on the much eroded gravestone of Sarah, the wife of Odadiah White. I drove the short distance to The Harty Ferry Inn. Before calling in for refreshment, I strolled down to the edge of the causeway from which the ferry boat used to ply across The Swale. The tide was in and there were hundreds of lapwing, curlew, godwits and other waders huddled among clumps of sea purslane, on the saltings, attempting to escape the winds. It was only when I was returning to the Ferry Inn that I noticed thousands of wood pigeons perching in hawthorn bushes on the steep cliff of London Clay that rises above the saltings along The Swale. All the birds were facing towards the sun and into the wind. It seems likely that many of these wood pigeons were visitors from mainland Europe. The species is, along with the rabbit, the main enemy of arable farmers. Both have an enormous appetite for the leaves of emerging oil seed rape plants, acres of which were growing on the island. The raptors I had come to see begin to congregate above Capel Fleet from about an hour before sunset and it was time for me to leave the warmth and comfort of the Ferry Inn and face the bitterly cold wind blowing across the top of the viewing platform. By the time I arrived, the mound sported a forest of tripods and thick, woolly hats. The harriers soon began to fly in, from various directions, criss-crossing each other's flight paths over the communal roost site in the reed beds of Capel Fleet. We also watched a mixed flock of lapwing and golden plover flying in to roost on nearby Harty grazing marshes. Ground roosting birds come together so as to warn each other about the presence of predators such as foxes. By the time that the sun had set behind the North Downs and left a pale, red glow in the sky, the spectacular was almost over. The prevailing opinion on the mound was that fifteen marsh harriers and one lone hen harrier had moved into the roosting place or were on the verge of doing so. The last of the customers for lunch at the Ferry Inn were driving past us, heading for home, some doubtless bemused by the sight of so many people muffled up as if for the South Pole. Having

bade my farewell, I decided to follow the diners. It had been an enjoyable day out.

Joe Ennis

CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR By Spooof Scoop
Upchurch's Only Investigative Journalist
It's taken me some time to enter the inner circle of UpARA (Upchurch Active Retirement Association), but I managed it on December 11th. The day was titled Christmas Spectacular, I had little idea what to expect. Perhaps some afternoon tea and a nice chat with the retired lay at the back of my mind. Wow how wrong I was thinking that. A two course meal, magic show, and dancing, but I am jumping ahead. To go back to the beginning, it all started in the afternoon at 2pm with a carol concert by the Holywell school choir. They were really very, very good, our village youngsters are something to be proud of, there must have been about forty in all, singing some old favourites and some lovely new carols. Their teachers must have worked tirelessly to have achieved such a high standard with the choir. This was followed by an explanation of a "Christmas Carol" by Malcolm Groves a club member. Did you know a carol was originally a pagan dance, no, well neither did I. As expected this was followed with a lovely cup of tea biscuits and cake, all provided free by the club. Expecting that this was the afternoon finished I collected my coat, I underestimated these retired folk. Next up was the Upchurch Choral Society. All I can say is, if you get a chance to hear them sing don't miss out, I'm glad I stayed, as Bryan Veale performed the memorable "If I was a rich man" from "Fiddler on the Roof", I thought I was back in London's West End, Marion Whentingham also sang "O Holy Night" as a lovely solo. The choir finished with a sing-a-long with all joining in. It was then that I realised this was but the prelude to even more. I had my ticket for the evening and rushed home to change and return at 6.45pm sharp as I was told. I doubted that the retired could better the afternoon, but I underestimated once again. While waiting for dinner to arrive our own Upchurch magic man (Masks & Magic) entertained with table illusions that baffled all. My dinner arrived piping hot, a succulent chicken breast, minted new potatoes, baby carrots (all English) and sweetcorn. Our very own magic man then entertained us further with a stage magic show. My meal finished with a fruit cheese cake and lashings of double cream. I had earlier told my other half I would be home about 9.30pm, after all this was the retired and I expected then to be heading home for a hot chocolate by then. Once again I was wrong, so very wrong. It was now music and dance time, with Jeff Pedley our Upchurch troubadour as entertainment. He in

turn was supported by the Pedletts a group of singers from the club membership. The evening continued till almost 11pm with dancing and singing. It would be an understatement to say everyone had a good time (including me) and I was late home, but for £10 a head these retired UpARA lot know how to do it. I look forward to next year!

IT'S PANTOMIME SEASON

Yes folks, the New Year is here and I send best wishes and good health to you all. If you are a child at heart like me, then you will have enjoyed the Christmas lights and decorations not to mention the food.

Now the old year has ticked its way out with a final hurrah and more than a few bangs, it is that wonderful time of the year - Pantomime time - Oh yes it is! It is a time for all of us kids from 5 to 95 to forget our troubles and buy our tickets for the Panto. There we can forget just for a while our aches, pains and creaking bones and boo and hiss at the villains, shout out "look behind you", cheer the heroes and sing along with the comedy fools, as well as fall in love with the leading lady. (Come on now sir and madam, you can still remember!)

The love of the Pantomime has stayed with me since childhood, be it as an actor or as a member of the audience, ever since my first memorable visit in 1947. As I write there are many hundreds of people across the country rehearsing various Pantomimes be they in theatres or church halls. We in the Medway Towns are particularly blessed with five or more companies. St Paul's Drama Group in Third Avenue, Gillingham, are in rehearsal for Cinderella which will be performed on 12th, 13th, 19th & 20th February with all the usual favourites - the Ugly Sisters, Buttons, the poor put upon Baron Hardup and of course Prince Charming, Cinderella and her wicked stepmother.

If you have never been to a Pantomime or play put on by the various companies in the Towns, you don't know what you are missing. Parents of young children why not take them to one of the Pantos. It need not cost a fortune and they will be grateful for ever. Please check out the groups on line and remember we are all children at Pantomimes so be prepared to boo and shout. You will be surprised how good you feel after the show. Pardon, what was that? Where will I be? I shall be on stage at St. Paul's Drama Group as Baron Hardup. So do come along and say hello, and have a great time with all the wonderful characters.

John Sansom

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Diary 2016

February 12, 13 19 & 20th - Cinderella, St Paul's Drama Group, Third Avenue, Gillingham, 7.30pm & Sat 20th 3.00pm, Adults £6, Cons £5 stpaulsdramagroup.co.uk or ring Box Office 01634 852712

February 13th Rainham S Councillor surgery Parkwood Youth Centre 10.00am - 12, no appointment needed
February 13th - Craft Market, St Margaret's Millennium Centre, 9.00am - 12.30pm Free entry, Stalls £5 from carole@cdadswell.freemove.co.uk or 07779 366054

February 13th - Medway Folk Dance Club, (see 16th Jan)
February 14th - Medway Towns Footpaths Group,

10.00am Meet John Williams 01622 764821 / 07977614033 Sheldwich Village Hall Car park, GR 015561 ME13 ONG for a 5 mile pleasant walk Couple of hills to climb. One Stile. No dogs

February 14th - Medway Ramblers Walk, 10.00am meet Jim 07807 896995, lewislad@hotmail.com Newnham, park considerably on roadside. TQ95457 for a 5.5 mile moderate undulating route, Pub at end.

February 14th - Bredhurst Garden Club, Alison Marsden - Year round Garden Interest for Flower Arrangers (20th)

February 15th - Medway Scramble Club, (see 18th Jan)

February 16th - The RSPB Medway Talk. Incredible birds of the world - Swapnil Kumbhojkar. (see 19th Jan)

February 16th - GHS Floral Art Group, 'Valentine corsage / fascinator' (wiring practice), (see 19th Jan)

February 18th - Rainham Women's Institute, Speaker on "Life as a young Army wife in Libya" (see 21st Jan)

February 18th - Wigmore Thursday Club, Nelson's Navy, Sandra Sharp, (see 21st Jan)

February 18th - Hempstead Leisure Club, Whist, board games tea and chat (see 21st Jan)

February 19th - UpARA, Walk, (see 5th Feb)

February 19th - Hempstead Whist Afternoons, (22nd Jan)

February 21st - Medway Ramblers Walk, 10.00am meet Geoff 07525161766, geoff.rambler@me.com

Carpenters Arms, Eastling, TQ962565 ME13 0AZ for a 6.5 mile leisurely walk. Pub at end, with lunches -book.

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February 21st - Medway Towns Footpaths Group, 10.00am, Meet Andy Boorman 07881 933358 The Street, Boughton Street. Park near White Horse Inn GR 057594 ME13 9AL for a 5.5 mile Walk - 'Last

Peasants Revolt' some stiles. Expect mud. No dogs

February 23rd - UpARA Coffee Morning, Upchurch Village Hall, 9.30am, £1.50, Guests £2, (see 5th Feb)

February 23rd - Rainbow Whist Drive, (see 26th Jan)

February 24th - Gillingham Horticultural Society, AGM and collect Potato & Bucket for Competition (27th Jan)

February 24th - All Saints Women's Fellowship, Spring/Summer 2016 Fashion: Eddy Golding, (see 27th Jan)

February 25th - Wigmore Thursday Club, Lorna Bailey on trip to Serbia delivering shoe boxes, (see 21st Jan)

February 25th - Hempstead Leisure Club, 'Tales of a man who talks a lot' talk by Rob Masters (see 21st Jan)

February 25th - Rainham & District Dolls' House and Miniaturist Group, (see 28th Jan)

February 26th - Ladies Pamper Evening MASH, 6.00pm, Gillingham Golf Club, Tickets £3 in advance, £4 on the door, massage, reflexology and manicure from £5 per treatment (pay stall holders) pre-book or a stall 01634 855844 or medwayasthmahelp@btconnect.com

February 26th - Medway Geographical Society, 'Slovakia by Caravan' Tony Mitchell, (see 22nd Jan)

February 27th - Wine and Wisdom, 7.30pm, St Matthew's Community Centre, Drewery Drive, Wigmore Table for 6-8 people, £5 pp Bring your own drinks and nibbles, Raffle Phone 01634 387793 or 01634 387425

February 27th - UpARA Outing, Kew Gardens Orchid Festival, (see 5th Feb)

February 27th - Medway Folk Dance Club, (see 16th Jan)

February 28th - Medway Towns Footpaths Group, 10.00am Meet Anne Bond /Pat Wells 07778302866 / 07804837155 Mote Park, Main Car park off Mote Ave. (£1 charge) 5.5 mile mainly flat walk with steep slopes 1 Stile and 30 Steps. No dogs

February 28th - Medway Ramblers Walk, 10.00am meet Tony/Ann 01634 406634, vajra.faulkner@gmail.com

Appledore near the church TQ957292 TN26 2DA for a 5 mile leisurely walk Bring a picnic Pub at end lunches

February 29th - Medway Scramble Club, (see 18th Jan)

March 1st - GHS Floral Art Group, 'St David's Day' - a daffodil spiral (using pin holder), (see 19th Jan)

March 1st - Rainham Horticultural Society, Pruning fruit trees, bushes & shrubs - Malcolm Withnall, (2nd Feb)

March 2nd - Brompton History Research Group Talk, The Chatham Scandal - Prostitution in Victorian Medway, 7.00pm RE Museum, King Arthur Road, Gillingham, ME4 4UG, Tickets £5. bhrbookings@gmail.com

March 2nd - The League of Friends' AGM, 7.30pm,

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Diary 2016

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March 3rd - Wigmore Thursday Club, A welcome return
visit by Mel Rees, (see 21st Jan)

March 3rd - Hempstead Leisure Club, "Elastix" exercise
for Seniors with Sue (see 21st Jan)

March 4th - UpARA, Walk, (see 5th Feb)

March 5th - Medway Towns Footpaths Group, Meet
Stephen Manning 07551 712438 London Capital Ring
Walk stage 2 for a 9 mile starting at Friars Lane,
Richmond via Osterley Lock, finish at Greenford. Ring
Stephen for details, No dogs

March 6th - Medway Towns Footpaths Group, 10.00am,
Meet Steve Giddings 07720 628511 Grove Ferry Picnic

Area car park (fee £2) GR 236631 CT3 4BP for a 5
mile circular walk. Very flat, could be muddy. No dogs

March 6th - Medway Ramblers Walk, 10.00am meet Jim,
jimbush46@btinternet.com Chilham car park at the

bottom of the hill. TR067536 CT4 8BZ for a 10 mile
moderate walk with some hills. Bring picnic lunch for
midway break, pub at end.

March 6th - Medway Ramblers Walk, 10.00am meet
Beryl, bmhosegood@live.co.uk East Malling Railway

Station Car Park. TQ703569 ME19 6AJ for a 5 mile
leisurely largely flat walk through orchards and

woodland with some fine views of The North Downs.
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Queen pub. Alternatively West Malling village.

March 7th - Rainham Women's Institute, Members
Meeting (see 21st Jan)

March 8th - Fuchsia and Pelargonium Society, Workshop
Evening, Practical advice about growing fuchsias and

pelargoniums (see 9th Feb)

March 8th - Friends of Medway Archives, 7.30pm at
Frindsbury Parish Hall, Church Green, ME2 4HY talk

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March 8th - Rainbow Whist Drive, (see 26th Jan)

March 9th - All Saints Women's Fellowship, Fund
raising, (see 27th Jan)

March 10th - Wigmore Thursday Club, The Royal
Voluntary Service, Caroline Carter, (see 21st Jan)

March 10.11.12.17.18.19 - Hayfever by Noel Coward,
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Office 0844 8793224 or www.oasthousetheatre.co.uk

March 11th - UpARA, Monthly Meetings, Upchurch
Village Hall, 2.00pm, Free, Guests £2, (see 5th Feb)

March 11th - Gillingham and Rainham Local History Soc
The Huguenots - Ann Huguenot Museum, (12th Feb)

March 12th - Craft Market, St Margaret's Millennium
Centre, (see 13th Feb)

March 12th - Medway Folk Dance Club, (see 30th Jan)

March 13th - Medway Towns Footpaths Group, 10.00am,
Meet Brian Gevaux 01634 235883 Marine Parade,

Barton Point, Coastal Park, Sheerness GR 940747
ME12 2BX For a 4 mile walk via The Lees and

Minster, mainly flat but uphill to cliffs and downhill to
Minster. Fields paths and unmade roads, No dogs

March 13th - Medway Ramblers Walk, 10.00am meet
Frank/Mim, Headcorn Church. Park considerably

TQ833442 TN27 9NH for a 7.5 mile leisurely circular
walk. Bring picnic for midway. Pub and cafe at end.

March 14th - Medway Scrabble Club (see 18th Jan)

March 14th - Concert Medway Organ & Keyboard Club,
Organist - Chris Powell (see 8th Feb)

March 15th - The RSPB Medway Local Group Talk, The
Plight of the Bumblebee - Dr Nikki Gammans (19th

March 15th - GHS Floral Art Group, 'St Patrick's Day' -
an inverted crescent arrangement, (see 19th Jan)

March 16th - Bredhurst Garden Club, Sue Shaw 'In the
Footsteps of Paddington Bear' Spring Show - Judge G.

Childmaid, (see 20th Jan)

March 17th - Wigmore Thursday Club, Britain on Foot,
Tony Mitchell, (see 21st Jan)

March 18th - Medway Geographical Society, 'A Career
in Island Hopping' - Alan Mills, (see 22nd Jan)

March 19th - Grand Charities Spring Bazaar! 10.30am -
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