

ACTION FORUM

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY FOR RAINHAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

JAN/FEB
2026

NUMBER 619
First published
March 1969

Mackland Arms Annual Outing 1937 - Recognise anyone?



The Mackland Arms pub is still going strong on Station Road.

This photo shows regulars on their annual outing in 1937.

The landlord/landlady were Joe & Nora Gillman. Names of some of those pictured are Jock Brown, Horace Moore, Sid Blundy and the lad with accordion was Freddy Hopkins.

(kindly provided by Fred Moore)

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Next issue : Feb 25th, 2026
Copy date : Feb 16th, 2026
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Editorial

Happy New Year to you and yours!

We hope you enjoyed a relaxing Christmas. I was sad not to see any real snow but am also aware that, for many, no snow is a blessing.

This first editorial of 2026 comes a little later as we combine our Jan and Feb edition but we hope there is plenty to keep you occupied. The letters and articles regarding The Howard's initial days have kept coming which has been wonderful. Don't miss the longer article on p12, written by the Honourable Secretary of The Anchorians Association. Whether memories are good or bad, its important that we are able to read and consider them all.

Following on from all these recollections, the vicar of St Margaret's, Nathan Ward, is looking for people happy record their memories of life around our area over the past century. What a fabulous resource to leave future generations. See p7 if you are interested in being involved.

I have no personal interaction with social media so was pleasantly surprised to read about the Banking Hub that has opened in Station Rd. Twydall Library Hub is hosting the first Repair Workshop in our immediate area and I am also intrigued by the Bee Taster Day - the price of honey makes it very tempting to 'harvest your own'!! See p5 for more information on all of those.

But many of you might want to look at the large advert on p15. There is a big event booked at the Oast in April and it may get sold out quickly. We are so fortunate to have a large venue like this in the middle of the town.

Enjoy all that our community has to offer.

Letters to the Editor

Wigmore Rd Prefabs (Oct issue)

Dear Editor,

October's cover picture of the Prefabs was a revelation. I was born in Rainham and lived at 172 Maidstone Rd until I bought a house in Lordswood in 1986.

I have strong memories of the Prefabs opposite our house which would have been demolished in the early 1960's. I'm not sure of the exact date but remember that it was a wet day and it was very sad to see the flimsy construction, but they served a need. I think we knew a couple who lived in one but I cannot remember their name.

A Carr family, not related, lived further up Maidstone Rd and he was a Chimney Sweep. I had a schoolfriend John Walkingshaw who lived further up Maidstone Rd and went to the Evangelical church in Durham Rd with our family. The last I'd heard, his family had moved to Herne Bay.

Mrs Stickings lived on the other side of the road, further up, with her son Ron. We were surprised to hear that her funeral cortege was taken by a coach and horses.

I can remember all the cherry orchards where we used to go 'scrumping' and when Parkwood was a wood where we would sometimes play.

My friend Mike Chapman, a fellow Gill's season ticket holder and AF distributor, gives me a copy of Action Forum each month.

Gerald Carr

Wigmore Rd Prefabs cont. (Oct issue)

I am Gerald Carr's younger brother Stephen. As already said, we lived on Maidstone Rd, opposite the prefabs. I was born in my mum's bedroom, back in 1957.

I do not remember the prefabs being there, but after demolition, I was playing on a dumper truck that was there and fell off, or was pushed, and remember being led across the road by a man who held a handkerchief over my cut. I still have a small scar over my right eye (I call it my war wound!).

When I left school in 1973 (Gillingham Tech, down Pump La) I started work for Ballard the Builders in Longley Road and I believe the semi detached houses that are on Maidstone Rd are some of their "Suntrap" design which I think I found out from someone at the works.

I have more memories of playing on the site of the Parkwood Estate, but they're for another time.

Regards, Stephen Carr

Howard School Memories (Nov issue)

Dear Editor,

I am I think quite unique. My story begins as a child taking the 11+ at Byron Rd and everyone believing I would pass but narrowly failing. Upbury Manor was my closest school. My brother and sister went there and had dreadful experiences so it was my mum (still alive at 101) who spent her summer fighting to get me into The Howard School. We moved from Gillingham on 21st August 1978, into our new house in Maidstone Rd. I started my new big school on Mon 4th Sept and wore my new Howard uniform with pride. I fought hard academically and was rewarded at the end of the first year with promotion from the A band to the Alpha band which meant I could go on to get a handful of O levels and take my A levels there.

My best memories are of the really supportive teachers who did not rule with the cane but who spared the rod and, in my case, did spoil

the child and that did me no harm. School was a harsher environment back then and those staff have now either passed on or are well into their retired years, looking back on their careers - I wonder what they would say?

But my story does not end there.

After leaving to work for a bank, I retrained as a teacher and spent the first 8 years of my career teaching at... The Howard School. How bizarre to be teaching alongside my heroes: Mr Harvey, Mr Terry, Mr Clark, Mr Fisher, Mr Horsfield, Mr Ansell and the late and great Eric Rotherham who taught into his eighties - along with many others. I was promoted and even appeared on stage a couple of times. The productions we used to do were incredible. I will never forget 'Smike' and going with the cast to stand on stage at Theatre Royal Drury Lane with staff and Simon May (writer of Eastenders music and Smike) - Glory Years.

New horizons beckoned and new schools came and went. I now approach my own retirement from a profession drastically changed. There is a demand on all staff... to be all things to all people... the list is endless.

But to my old school, both as a child and as a young man, I tip my hat to all who served in that place and to those who now hold the torch high and take it forward with all its 50 years of history.

Yours with thanks, AO

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28th February
Twydall Community Hub, 10.30am - 1pm

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27th Feb, 7pm,
Upchurch Golf Club
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Smile Malawi Tuesday Social Club update

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Nature Notes

Bio-Security versus Bio-Diversity

Attending a webinar organised by the Community Tree Nursery Collaborative to discuss biosecurity, I was reminded that biodiversity can provide far better biosecurity than a protected monoculture. Sure, 'weeds' can attract pests and harbour diseases but they also attract pest predators, confusing would-be predators and diseases by providing other targets. 'Companion planting' enables the reduced use of chemicals, often eliminating use altogether. A recent report highlighted the value of a strip of uncultivated wildflowers and grasses between rows in an orchard, reducing the need for chemical sprays.

The same principles apply in our gardens. Neatly maintained flowerbeds and lawns need chemicals, time and effort so there is a place for encouraging greater, wilder biodiversity. Rather than clearing and binning leaves, pile them hidden at the back of the border to be taken down by worms or decay into fertile leaf mold. They also provide hibernation habitat for pollinating bumble-bees. Similarly, dead stalks left over winter become homes for hibernating lacewings, earwigs and ladybirds who are waiting to frustrate aphid populations from building in the Spring.

Then there are the birds looking for seeds

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amongst the still-standing seed heads; food needed to sustain their population and deal with the likes of aphids and caterpillars when the warmth returns and life in the garden begins to flourish again.

At Cozenton Park Community Tree Nursery, I'm amazed at what has so far been achieved by the volunteers there, who enjoy working together, visibly transforming that part of the site, in sometimes challenging weather.

The Tree Nursery is just the beginning. Early next year it's intended to establish both a Community Garden and allotment area on other areas of the same site, enabling residents to grow their own produce and the onsite community to work together in the Community Garden learning to garden, working together and supporting one another while enjoying the benefits of fresh air and exercise amongst the surrounding greenery and wildlife.

There's so much potential as various elements of our wider Rainham community are able to become involved.

If you want to get involved in the Community Tree Nursery, come and say hello on a Thursday, between 10am and 2pm. Warm drinks and biscuits are provided but bring your own lunch.

Wild About Rainham with Leon Roskilly (Facebook)

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Jan/Feb in the Wildlife-Friendly Garden

Happy New Year to you all.

Looking back on the past five years of articles, I find that I complain about the weather all the time!

The fact that the weather is so extreme and unexpected is something that exercises us all as we struggle to grow and nurture plants and wildlife in our home spaces. The effect of getting older seems to be that I am less resilient to extremes of temperature change, suffering in the summer heat or shivering in the winter cold. This last period between Christmas and early January has brought a new symptom to this aging body; the sheer cold of the air has made my chest ache if I venture outside.

I used to say every winter,

"Wrap up warm and just do a little bit in the garden each day."

Well, I've changed my tune, well and truly!

So now, we are just waiting for warmer weather and enjoying the few early blooms in the garden.

Climber of the month

Last year I focused on a different shrub each month, with the idea of finding blooms for each month of the year and an easy-care solution for difficult spaces in the garden. This year, I thought we could look at climbing plants that would provide a lot of pollen and nectar without using a lot of ground space. We may be limited by ground area, but there

can be a lot of height that we can use.

The first, most important, thing we need is adequate support for the potential weight of the plant. With gales a likely and frequent component of our weather from now on, we want to ensure the security of our new plantings.

There are many elements to consider when we plant climbers and I hope to cover some of these aspects over the coming issues. Clematis is a popular climber to grow, with many different ones for year round colour. There are two varieties of *Clematis cirrhosa* that flower well this time of the year. These are 'Freckles', a cultivar that has been popular for many years and 'Wisley Cream'. These two are also popular with early bumble bees. Also, for this time of the year, are those from the Forsteri group of New Zealand parentage, mostly white.

Jobs of the month

I would recommend inside jobs, like checking, cleaning and sorting pots. Any areas you use for potting up will benefit from a clean and tidy. Then prepare, if you can, for your next task, whatever it is.

Happy wildlife-friendly gardening,

Victoria Golding
(KWT, Wild About Gardens advisor)

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bin, helping to keep the streets clean. To help with this recycling process, please can you remove plastic windows from any envelopes and the staples from documents.

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Litter? Snap - Bin - Win! Medway Council have partnered with Litter Lotto to make on-street waste disposal fun and easy.

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- 1 - download the free Litter Lotto app
- 2 - photograph yourself depositing litter in any on-street bin
- 3 - you're in the prize draw!

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Historic Homes Retrofit Session

Join the Intra Community Trust's heritage property retrofit event this month, where a leading expert will share practical insights for retrofitting heritage properties.

Thursday 29th Jan, 6.30pm,
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www.ticketsource.co.uk/livemusicevent/medway-historic-homeowners-retrofit-project/e-yzgrjx

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Rainham History

The Howard School cont.

The article of *Action Forum* (Nov 2025) covering the 50th anniversary of The Howard School will, I'm sure, have stirred many memories of former students' time there, including my own.

To add some further context to E Barton's article, the Howard School was, indeed, a new school in 1975 bringing together the former Gillingham Grammar School and Rainham Boys' Secondary School – a situation brought about in the 1960s by the Labour policy to do away with selective education, and grammar schools in particular (the Education Secretary, Anthony Crossland is reputed to have said, "If it's the last thing I do, I'm going to destroy every ... grammar school in England. And Wales and Northern Ireland."). The Howard School, therefore, was established as a 'bilateral', Grammar-Modern school with both Grammar ('Alpha') and secondary ('A') streams.

I was at the Grammar School from 1973 before we moved to The Howard School. The new School's Board of Governors approved the adoption of the Anchorians Association as a 'ready-made' Old Boys' organisation. The Howard School badge includes an anchor and the colour purple, shared with the Association to cement the link (the Grammar School's motto was '*Valet Anchora Virtus*' – virtue is our anchor).

Of course, experiences of one's school days will differ; some will recall them with fondness, while others less so. It is difficult to say which boys had the easiest transition but those of us who moved from the Grammar School, located in Third Ave (now occupied by Robert Napier) left a school of 600 for one almost three times bigger, with three to four times as many staff and spread across a 'campus' of 7 or 8 buildings, many of which had been purpose-built for the new school.

I do not recognise a school "ruled through fear" and "intense authority" – discipline yes, albeit far

less than that experienced at the Grammar School. Nor can I vouch that fellow students were subjected to "corporate [*sic* – I presume the author means 'corporal'] punishments".

John Hicks, Headmaster of the Grammar School since Jan 1963, became The Howard's first Headmaster. At the Grammar School, he was often seen walking the corridors in his academic gown, speaking to boys and staff and looking into classrooms to check all was in order. At The Howard, he was more or less invisible, rather like a CEO administering a large, multi-faceted organisation. He ventured out only to attend the occasional lower-, middle- or upper-school assembly in their respective buildings (the hall was far too small to hold all-school assemblies). Despite this, John Hicks sought to inculcate a 'one school' ethos and culture – or at least, that's what he told our parents as we prepared for the move. I am not sure, based on my time at the School, whether he achieved this. The fact that The Howard was bilateral may have mitigated against this objective; in my view, in its early years, Mr Hicks's perception of the new school was gilded through the 'rose-tinted spectacles' of his former Grammar School charges. This was most unfair on the former Rainham Secondary boys, some of whom I know feel they were treated as second-class citizens.

More positively, the bilateral structure allowed those boys who may have had an 'off day' when they sat the '11-plus' or hit their straps a little later in their schooling, to transition relatively seamlessly and with far less disruption from the secondary modern ('A') to the grammar ('Alpha') band. (I don't know if any 'grammar' boys ever went the other way.) There was no need to change schools, and one could keep in touch with one's friends, including through sport, music and other extra-curricular activities.

Yours sincerely, Nigel Fray,
Hon. Secretary, The Anchorians Association

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WORLD SLIMMING

Dates for the Diary

Request an entry in the diary (free of charge)
contact: diary@actionforum.co.uk

23rd Jan - 'Mexico' with Medway Geographical Society, 2pm, URC, Balmoral Rd, ME7 4PU, £4, 01634 389916 or vwoollett@hotmail.co.uk

28th Jan - Medway Talk by Prof Aamer Sarfaz of Canterbury Christchurch University, on 'ADHD and ASD: Myths and Reality', 5.30pm, Medway Campus, Rowan Williams Court, ME4 4UF, free attendance and parking but registration required, www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/medway-talks-universities-at-medway-open-lecture-series-2025-26-tickets-191667253269?aff=odddtcreator

28th Jan - 'Kentish Smugglers' with Geoff Hufton, £4, Millenium Centre, 7pm, 01634 263622

1st Feb - RSPB Medway guided walk, Oare Marshes, 10am, ME13 0QD, group.rspb.org.uk/medway

7th Feb - Rainham Food and Craft Market, finest quality local food and craft produce, The Oast, Granary Close, Rainham, 10am-2pm, dog/family friendly

9th Feb - Medway Music Club w Brett Wales, Parkwood Community Centre, 7.30pm, refreshments/bar, £10, phil.burt@ntlworld.com or 07795 576294

10th Feb onwards - 'Whales', Rochester Cathedral Sculptures by Tessa Campbell Fraser in partnership with MESSUMS ORG.

Mon – Fri, 10-5, Sat – 10-4, Sun – 12-4
Free admission during the daytime, suitable for all ages,

11th Feb - 'Waterwise - the journey of water from source to tap', with East Medway u3a, 2pm, St Paul's, Parkwood ME8 9PN, membership.eastmedway@gmail.com

13th Feb - St Paul's Drama Group presents 'Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves', **7.30pm**, £9 adults, £6 children, Third Ave Community Hall, ME7 2LU, www.ticketsource.co.uk/spdg or www.stpaulsdramagroup.co.uk

14th Feb - 'Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves', 2pm, as above

15th Feb - RSPB Medway guided walk, Hanningfield Reservoir, 10am, CM11 1WT, group.rspb.org.uk/medway

17th Feb - RSPB Medway guided walk, Riverside Country Park, 9.30am, ME7 2XH, group.rspb.org.uk/medway

17th Feb - 'Around the World in 80 Minutes' with Chris Collins, RSPB Indoor Talk, Parkwood Community Centre, 7pm, £4.50, info.rspbmedway@gmail.com

19th Feb - Wigmore and Bredhurst Garden Club talk, 'Planting for Beneficial Insects' with Vanessa Jones, 1.45pm, Howard Memorial Hall, Membership £15 per quarter, entrance fee £2, Visitors get first visit for free and membership is £10 for first quarter, 07531 624679

21st Feb - 'Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves', 2pm and 7.30pm

24th Feb - Tuesday Social Club update on 'Smile Malawi' by founder Elspeth Baecke, 7.30pm, £4 on door, refreshments/raffle, Memorial Hall, School Lane, ME9 7ES, 01795 842272

25th Feb - 'Dutch in Medway' with Steve Bird, £4, Millenium Centre, 7pm, 01634 263622

27th Feb - 'Theatre Royal, Chatham' with Medway Geographical Society, 2pm, URC, Balmoral Rd, ME7 4PU, £4, 01634 389916 or vwoollett@hotmail.co.uk

27th Feb - Charity Duck Race Night with Gillingham Rotary Club, Upchurch Golf Club, includes a 2-course supper, 7pm, £20, 01634 220127 or thesanford@screeching.net

28th Feb - Repair Café, Twydall Comm Hub, 10.30-1

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

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

Medway Scrabble Club, alternate Mons, St Stephen's, Maidstone Road, Chatham, 07523 124668

St Matthew's Film Club, 2pm, last Monday of month, £2 for refreshments, geoff.hufton@hotmail.co.uk or 01634 234 712

The Thursday Club, St. Matthews Community Centre, Wigmore, 2pm, contact Geoff on 01634 234712/ geoff.hufton@hotmail.co.uk

Bredhurst Whist Club, every Tues, 7-10pm, Bredhurst Village Hall, 07707 669915

Hempstead Players community theatre group, 18+, 07421 817158/thehempsteadplayers.co.uk

Rainham WI, 3rd Thurs of mth, Rainham Cricket Club, 1.45pm, small charge, 01634 616003

Rainham Horticultural Society, 1st Tues each mth, 7pm, Rainham Cricket Club, 07954 180590, rainham.kent.horticultural@gmail.com

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

Borstal Bowls Club, every Thurs, 6pm, Brambletree, Woudham Rd, ME1 3TN, find us on Facebook

Refresh Coffee Morning at RCF Baptist Church, Twydall (ME8 6XE). Every 2nd and 4th Tues of mth, Drop in 10.30am-12 noon. All welcome.

www.rcftwydall.org.uk

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Detling Short Mat bowls club, three sessions each week, 7.30pm Mon, 2 pm on Tues and Fri, £3 inclu refreshments, phone Patricia Ellis on 07919514934.

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

Twydall Village Garden Club, every 2nd Tues of mth, 7pm, Labour Club Hall, Twydall, £3.50 including refreshments. Visiting speakers, demonstrations, raffle, quiz, annual Sept show, 01634 853884

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