

# ACTION FORUM

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY FOR RAINHAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

MAR  
2026

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## Rainham Conservation Area in 2004



Our cover photo shows the centre of Rainham in 2004.  
How many changes can you spot in the last 22 years?

(photo from [Rainham-History.co.uk](http://Rainham-History.co.uk))

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## **Editorial**

I have to begin this month's editorial with an apology! Many trying to contact us with diary events, via email, experienced problems.

This issue has now been resolved. Thank you to all who persevered and found a 'work-around'. It was much appreciated. If you haven't received a reply, please do send again.

This month contains the last letter we have received regarding the Howard School. It has been wonderful to receive so many of people's personal memories and reflections of some of the important early years of their lives. Good or bad, positive or negative, they play an important role in preserving modern history.

Our local theatre offerings continue, with RATS, Hempstead Players and Three Towns Theatre Co all hosting events this month. Do check out the diary for times and contact details along with the adverts on p5 and 6.

Olwen O'Dowd has begun thinking through the department stores she remembers locally. Shopping has changed so radically over the years. I am fascinated by the number of small corner shops and post offices that once abounded and have now been converted into houses or flats. It feels as if there was one on almost every corner in some areas!

Which brings me nicely to p12, our front cover this month and the birds-eye view of Rainham Conservation Area. It rarely feels very conserved as I drive past, albeit neither does Lower Rainham during peak traffic! Perhaps an hour or so pottering from the White Horse PH, past the Post Office and up to the traffic lights before crossing to come back to St Margarets would open my eyes to some of what we are conservers of...

## **Letters to the Editor**

### **Winter in Rainham** (Dec issue)

Dear Editor,

Regarding the 'Winter of 1962/63' front photo in the Dec issue, as a 7 yr old I remember the Winter of 1947 which, to my young eyes, was even worse than 1962.

Food rationing was in full swing, together with that of coal. Wives (always the wives) would queue at Gillingham gas works with prams and push chairs in the hope of being able to obtain a supply of coke.

Chatham Hill was virtually impassable and the edges of the side roads in Gillingham were piled high with snow, making them virtually one-way. Council workers struggled to keep even bus routes open; there were still very few cars. It didn't stop us youngsters spending Saturday's out in the cold making snow men and snow balls. We were much tougher than today's youngsters!

Michael J. Locke, Rainham

### **Howard School cont.** (Oct issue)

Dear Editor

I read with interest your article about the Howard school, which I attended.

I was at Rainham Comprehensive, or 'The Campus' as it was known, in 1974 as a first-year student. In 1975 when the Howard opened, I moved from the 'A' stream (those who hadn't passed the 11+) to the 'Alpha' stream, the grammar section of the school. I was asked to move because I had achieved the standard required to transition to the Alpha section.

This wouldn't have happened if the school hadn't been created. As a result, I started studying subjects such as Economics, Latin and Physics, all of which were not available to A stream students.

I can honestly say this opportunity made a significant difference to my attitude to studying and to my post-school prospects during a time of high unemployment.

With regards to the discipline in the school, there was indeed tight control on pupil behaviour but, with 1500 hormonal teenage

boys, there needed to be. During my time there, the school regularly employed the use of the "slipper" for relatively trivial offences and the "cane" for serious transgressions. It is interesting to reflect that students, parents and community leaders never questioned its use. It was employed without reference to your parents. I wonder how that would be received today!

I'm not suggesting beating kids is ever a good idea but it worked. Trust me, whilst it was seen as a badge of honour by the students, you never made the same mistake again. Having to make the walk of shame to Mr Hicks' office was something you only did once. I can still feel the pain today!!

Happy days! Alan Hickmott

#### **Maidstone Rd Pre-Fabs** (Oct issue)

Dear Editor,  
I was born at 156 Maidstone Rd in October 1937. During WW2, I lived with my parents 15 High St, but in 1950 I moved back to 156 Maidstone Rd. I remember the pre-fabs very well as they were opposite our house. In 1956, some of them were used to house refugees from Hungary after the uprising there. When they were being demolished, my father bribed some men to let him have some of the concrete slabs from the fireplaces to make the apron outside our garage. They are still there and do a fine job!

Yours sincerely, Roger Gulvin

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#### **Department Stores in Medway**

Dear Editor,  
Visiting Twydall Library last week I read about the Medway Archives exhibition on Department stores in the Medway Towns. I starting trying to remember the stores I knew in the 1950/60's.

I am unsure if Roseby Household Linens, Towels and Curtains had a store in Chatham and Hempstead Valley but I still have two white cotton towels bought from one store. Lefevres in Gillingham High St was were, as a proud mum, I bought my three-year-old son a lovely beige mackintosh type coat. There's also a memory of a Tesco near the library at the lower end of the Gillingham High St.

Featherstone's, Rochester was another store but items were beyond the pocket of a young couple with a baby and mortgage, unless in the sales. The Co-op in Chatham was big, had the Co-op Bank instore and sold everything. I remember buying heavy curtains there, speaking to an assistant who stood behind the enormous counter with measure embedded in the counter. Co-op had good stores in Gillingham and Rainham for many years.

Just a few of my memories, perhaps others have more. A visit to Medway Archives may discover other hidden gems of Medway's past.

Olwen O'Dowd

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Booking essential - £12 pp, cash only,  
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### Medway Repair Café

14th March  
Luton Library, 10.30am - 1pm

### Hempstead Players

Join us for not one but two one-act comedies:  
'Scraples' and 'The Weekend'

Friday 13th March 7.30pm  
Saturday 14th March 3pm

Book tickets at:  
[www.thehempsteadplayers.co.uk](http://www.thehempsteadplayers.co.uk)

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- St Margaret's Church on 3rd Sat

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### Three Towns Theatre Co - New Show

'And We'll Sing Once More' tells the tale of Camp Crescendo and the fight to save it. A fun and uplifting concert, refreshments are available but you may also bring your own drinks and nibbles.

Sat 28th March, 2pm and 7pm  
Upchurch Village Hall

Book tickets or a table on 07720 953383 or  
[www.ticketsource.co.uk/three-towns](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/three-towns)

### City of Rochester Symphony Orchestra

'Music from the Stage' includes songs from Sweeney Todd, Phantom, West Side Story, Wicked etc, plus orchestral items.

29th March, 3pm at Glassbox Theatre,  
Mid-Kent College, Tickets are £20  
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[Glassboxtheatre.com](http://Glassboxtheatre.com)

### 'Look at the World' Spring Concert

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## Nature Notes

### Its Almost Spring!

Daylight is increasing slowly and in-between the many rain showers and storms are moments of beautiful sunshine. The daffodils are blooming and change is on its way. I came across an old booklet on my shelf, a pre-cursor to a book that was coming out, highlighting ways to safeguard our health as the seasons change - this edition seemed like a good opportunity to look at some of the recommendations in the booklet.

Did you know that Vitamin D is called the 'Sunshine Vitamin'? Your body takes the ultraviolet B rays of the sun and transforms them into the vitamin, building strong bones and supporting brain and nerve function. It also activates our immune cells to ward off infection.

Apparently, there are also foods rich in Vitamin D and some of them are beginning to grow at this early time of the season: **rhubarb, mint, thyme, lemon balm, nettles, bay leaves, rosemary, sorrel...**

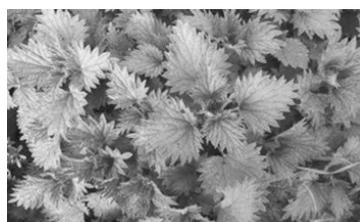
There are many challenges in this season - flu, colds, sore throats persist as viruses thrive in the warmer weather. At the same time, trees and plants come into flower, releasing their pollen.

But there are several plants with natural

anti-histamine properties, including **nettle** and **elderflower**.

Start ingesting them regularly the month before hayfever symptoms usually begin.

Young nettle shoots can be added to soups or stews with other vegetables, whilst steeping a handful of nettle tops in a bowl of boiling water for 15 mins or more lets the flavour develop for a hot tea and can be kept in the fridge for the day if you prefer cold drinks to hot.



Nettles are amazing! We already know from previous articles that they are fantastic in

the garden for wildlife but, apparently, they contain three times as much calcium as raw kale and are a source of protein, iron, vitamin A, C, magnesium and potassium - who knew!

Anti-inflammatory plants also help so look to eating more food such as:

**beans, lentils, oily fish, avocados, nuts and seeds, veg and fruit (including seeds, pith and edible skins), berries and dark-coloured fruits.**

'Root to Stem' by Alex Laird  
by penguinrandomhouse

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### March in the Wildlife-Friendly Garden

We have had plenty of rain since I last wrote. Digging into usually very dry areas, in rain shadow because of fences, or under trees and bushes, I am surprised to find wet soil as much as 30cm deep. Will the wet continue, or will we suddenly turn round to find it is all dry again?

So, going out into nature is difficult as paths are slippery, with steep areas now not passable at all. In my garden, I am working mainly from hard standing as the grassy areas cut up quickly and I don't want to compact the soil structure.

There are a lot of small, white worms in the garden finding much of the debris that I didn't clear in the winter which, I think, will help in the longer term.

During the odd dry day, I am clearing overgrown plants as quickly as I can and moving woody and leafy material to the backs of borders. Soon, I will start to trim my edges as, for the first time in my life, I crave some order and tidiness. I am grateful for work that we did in previous years.

The early bulbs are doing well, although not in full bloom because of the rain. A patch of little daffodils, *Narcissus cyclamineus*, has definitely increased in number. I always used to grow them in pots, but they are doing so much better by being naturalised in the grass.

### Climber of the month

I was wanting to keep on with my Clematis

theme, but I find that my *Clematis alpina* is further away from blooming than usual so, I will go with something that isn't a climber, but a really tall shrub.

*Daphne bholua* "*Jacqueline Postill*" has been a real star in our garden, growing to 3m. in less than five years!

There are thousands of blooms in flower at present, although, again, the very wet weather means that it isn't being visited by bees at present.



### Jobs of the month

Again, I would encourage you to do what you are able at present. Even an hour will make a difference to your patch.

Listen to, or watch, the local weather reports to plan a slot in the day to make a difference outside.

I am visiting garden centres to find some seasonal colour to cheer us all.

Happy wildlife-friendly gardening,

Victoria Golding  
(KWT, Wild About Gardens advisor)

[www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk)



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## Climate Conversations

### 'Fix My Street, Please' A Stockey

Have you, like me, seen things broken around our town that need fixing?  
You maybe even said to yourself, 'That's not safe!' but not known who to tell.

Well, the FixMyStreet app is just the tool you need, as it routes your report directly to the team in your Council responsible for fixing that particular issue.

My experiences with FixMyStreet are generally positive though, occasionally, you may need to get your ward councillor to help as well.

The app brings up a little map to pinpoint where the issue is, then asks you to confirm the details of what the issue is. There are multiple categories from abandoned vehicles, potholes, trees to street cleaning. Once the category has been selected, the more specific your report the better the council can prioritise and get things moving. You can add photos which will be especially helpful.

For me, it hasn't always worked first time but you get a prompt after 3 months, asking you if the issue has been fixed. You are then able to provide an update.

Occasionally, when things have gone very quiet, e.g. the overgrown shrubs blocking the pavement on the A2 near Manor Farm are still causing a hazard, then I have raised a second report. I have since received further assurance that it is being dealt with.

If you feel an issue is 'stuck' then write to your ward councillor and ask for help - persistence pays off in my experience!

The council are busy and will always prioritise the most dangerous issues first so, be patient but don't ignore things.

Why not let us know how you get on and, perhaps, write to Action Forum with your successes.



### Finding your ward councillors

You can find them at:

[www.medwayelects.co.uk](http://www.medwayelects.co.uk) under your local areas of either Hempstead and Wigmore, Rainham North, Rainham South East or Rainham Southwest.

You could also write to your councillor direct via email, e.g.

[Gary.Hackwell@medway.gov.uk](mailto:Gary.Hackwell@medway.gov.uk)

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## ***Rainham History***

### **Rainham's Conservation Areas**

Looking at the front cover photo, one can pick out a number of locations familiar to many.

Starting in the bottom left corner, the former site of the Co-op has now become the Healthy Living Centre, with a restaurant next door - now Galata restaurant. This is now next to Reynolds Workspace, previously a gym and originally a Parsonage.

One of the biggest changes is the Royal Mail Sorting office that was demolished and one can see Appletree Court in the process of being built in the photo.

In the distance you can see the Total petrol station that has now become Asda, as well as the fields that have been developed for Leigh Academy School and housing on Otterham Quay Lane.

Did you know that the area in the photo is one of four conservation areas we have around Rainham? The others include Lower Rainham, Meresborough and Moor Street.

The Rainham Conservation area was designated in January 1977. A significant part of the town centre is of architectural and historic interest and there was a desire to preserve and enhance its character.

The area is centred on the original village of Rainham, thought to have originated as a Roman settlement sited on the coastal route from the Channel to London which was known as Watling Street.

The Romans drained the surrounding marshland for grazing and established a port

at Otterham Quay where remains of seven Roman vessels were discovered in 1881. Rainham's original function was to serve the local agricultural community and for centuries it remained the focus for a prosperous fruit and hop farming area.

Rainham Church has existed from at least Saxon times and the current church, dating from the middle of the Thirteenth Century, is a particularly fine example. It is Grade B listed for its architectural and historic interest.

Besides the church, there are 7 other Grade II Listed buildings interspersed along the High Street.

94/96 High Street is a 16th Century timber-framed house that has been re-fronted. The Green Lion at 104 is a large timber framed building re-fronted in the 18th Century. 160, 174 (Durland House) and 113 (Old Parsonage) are all 18th Century houses. These buildings are loosely linked by modest 18th and 19th Century terraces, built in with red or yellow stock bricks. Some retain sash windows on the first floor and many feature smaller dormer windows at roof level.

Stratford Oasts is an early to mid 19th Century group of five brick oasts, three conical and two square, which mark the skyline with their distinctive white cowlings. Rainham Amateur Theatrical Society converted the end Oast house in 1962 whilst the remaining buildings were converted into residential units in 1987.

Why not take a closer look next time you pass by this conservation area of ours!

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## Dates for the Diary

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

**1st Mar** - RSPB Medway guided walk, Sevenoaks Nature Reserve, 10am, TN13 3DH, [group.rspb.org.uk/medway](http://group.rspb.org.uk/medway)

**2nd Mar** - 'Happy Hour' singing group with Friends of St Margarets, Lower Halstow, 6.30pm, Memorial Hall, ME9 7ES, Liz 07730893747 or [gilliangay99@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:gilliangay99@yahoo.co.uk)

**3rd Mar** - RSPB Medway Zoom Talk, 'Birds of Greece and its Islands' with John Buckingham, £3pp, 7.15pm, [group.rspb.org.uk/medway](http://group.rspb.org.uk/medway)

**6th Mar** - World Day of Prayer, 1.45pm, Frindsbury Baptist, Cooling Rd, ME2 4RG

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

**7th-29th March** - River Medway Journeys community art exhibition, Historic Dockyard, ME4 4TZ, 10-4, daily

**9th Mar** - Medway Music Club w Pete Shaw, Parkwood Community Centre, 7pm, refreshments/bar, £10, [phil.burt@ntlworld.com](mailto:phil.burt@ntlworld.com) or 07795 576294

**Mar** - '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 Mar** - 'Avro Vulcan: the Delta Deterrent' by Guy Bartlett, with East Medway u3a, 2pm, St Paul's, Parkwood, ME8 9PN, £3 for guests  
[membership.eastmedway@gmail.com](mailto:membership.eastmedway@gmail.com)

**12th Mar** - 'Poor Relief and Workhouses' by David Carder, Eastgate House, Rochester, 2pm, £5, booking essential - 01634 967292

**13th Mar** - Hempstead Players present 'Humour in Hempstead', 7.30pm, [www.thehempsteadplayers.co.uk](http://www.thehempsteadplayers.co.uk)

**14th Mar** - Repair Café, Luton Library, 10.30-1

**14th Mar** - Hempstead Players present 'Humour in Hempstead', 3pm, [www.thehempsteadplayers.co.uk](http://www.thehempsteadplayers.co.uk)

**15th Mar** - BWAG Woodland Task Day on general woodland maintenance, meet at the Hurstwood Rd allotments at 9.45am (ME7 3JZ), dress for work and weather, bring refreshments, all volunteers welcome, 07772 920359/  
[info@bwag.org.uk](mailto:info@bwag.org.uk)

**15th Feb** - RSPB Medway guided walk, Knepp & Warnham, 10am, RH13 8NQ, [group.rspb.org.uk/medway](http://group.rspb.org.uk/medway)

**16th Mar** - 'Happy Hour' singing group with Friends of St Margarets, Lower Halstow, 6.30pm, Memorial Hall, ME9 7ES, Liz 07730893747 or [gilliangay99@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:gilliangay99@yahoo.co.uk)

**17th Mar** - 'Beavers' with Ben Norris, RSPB Indoor Talk, Parkwood Community Centre, 7pm, £4.50, [info.rspbmedway@gmail.com](mailto:info.rspbmedway@gmail.com)

**19th Mar** - Wigmore and Bredhurst Garden Club talk, 'Mediterranean Plants for the Kent Coast' with William Friend, 1.45pm, Howard Memorial Hall, Membership £15 per quarter, entrance fee £2, first visit for free, membership £10 for first quarter, 07531 624679

**19th-21st Mar** - The Lion Queen, Oasthouse Theatre, Rainham, 8pm, 03336 663366/  
[www.oasthousetheatre.co.uk](http://www.oasthousetheatre.co.uk)

**20th Mar** - Murder Mystery Evening with the Friends of St Margaret's Church, £12pp, St Margaret's Jnr Schl, Orchard St, 7pm, booking essential, 01634 230183, (see p5)

**25th Mar** - 'Passchendaele to Peace - did the war end in 1918?' with Melanie Gibson-Barton, £4, Millenium Centre, 7pm, 01634 263622

**27th Mar** - 'Wildlife of Costa Rica' with Medway Geographical Society, 2pm, URC, Balmoral Rd, ME7 4PU, £4, 01634 389916 or [vwoollett@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:vwoollett@hotmail.co.uk)

**28th Mar** - Maidstone and Medway Sinfonia Spring Concert, 7.30pm, St Matthew's Community Centre, ME8 ONP, £14, [www.ticketsource.co.uk/mms](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/mms) or cash on the door, children free, [mandmsinfonia@gmail.com](mailto:mandmsinfonia@gmail.com)

**28th Mar** - 'And We'll Sing Once More' is a new show by Three Towns Theatre Co, Upchurch Village Hall, 2pm and 7pm, refreshments available, BYO drinks and nibbles, [www.ticketsource.co.uk/three-towns](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/three-towns) or call 07720 95338,

**29th Mar** - Music from the Stage with City of Rochester Symphony Orchestra, The Glassbox Theatre, Mid-Kent College, ME7 1FN, 3pm, [Glassboxtheatre.com](http://Glassboxtheatre.com) £20, Students £5, Children £1

**Rainham Health Walk**, every Weds, 10.30am St Margaret's, followed by an active and wellbeing session inside at 12pm, [walking@medway.org.uk](mailto:walking@medway.org.uk)

**Evergreen Club**, each Wed, 2pm, Bredhurst VH,

**Kent Classic & Sports Car Club**, 2nd Thurs of mth, Three Mariners, Lower Rainham, 01634 362612

**Gillingham Inner Wheel**, Women's organisation based on friendship and service, supporting both local and overseas charities, two Tues a month, Upchurch Golf Club for lunch, followed by a meeting on various interesting topics.  
[chrismorris648@gmail.co.uk](mailto:chrismorris648@gmail.co.uk) for more details.

**Rainham & District Dollshouse & Miniaturist Group**, last Thurs of mth, 7.30pm, Howard Hall, Wigmore, 01634 264295/[rainhamdhkent@gmail.com](mailto:rainhamdhkent@gmail.com)

**Lower Halstow short mat bowls**, each Mon 2-4, Wed 7.30-9.30, [glenyslovell@hotmail.com](mailto:glenyslovell@hotmail.com)/01795 842376

**Knit and Natter**, every Tues, 12-2pm, Rainham Mark Social Club, ME8 6YX, bring your craft, come and chat

**Hempstead Valley Short Mat Bowls Club**, contact Joy on 01622 693101

**Upchurch Horticultural Society**, 1st Wed each mth, 97 Chaffes Lane, contact: [upchurchsociety@gmail.com](mailto:upchurchsociety@gmail.com)

**Rainham Community Choir**, every Mon 7pm, Rainham Oast, £5, contact [cdlmedway@gmail.com](mailto:cdlmedway@gmail.com)

**Reflex Photographic Club**, Thurs, 7.45pm, Rainham School for Girls, [www.reflexphoto.co.uk](http://www.reflexphoto.co.uk)

Check out [www.thenet.uk.net/events](http://www.thenet.uk.net/events)

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