

ACTION FORUM

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY FOR RAINHAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

JULY
2026

NUMBER 624
First published
March 1969

Mardale Garage, A2, Rainham



A number of months ago, we featured a photo and letter about Mardale Garage, also known over the years as Brian Ward and Amoco but, currently, Asda Petrol! This is a photo we have been supplied, showing an aerial view of the garage back in 1963/4

(photo provided by Sarah Allen)

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Next issue : July 22nd, 2026
Copy date : July 13th, 2026
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Diary@actionforum.co.uk
Adverts@actionforum.co.uk (prices on p14)
Distribution (no other queries please):
07791 585998
Post: 5 Meresborough Farm Cottages,
Meresborough, Kent, ME8 8PP

Editorial

I trust you are all enjoying the warm early summer we have been experiencing. My water butts were drained dry so we were very much relieved following the week of on-off rain recently. Unfortunately, the warm and humid weather has not helped my tomatoes - I believe they have tomato blight but, if I am fortunate, I might get some tomatoes from the plants before it is too late.

It was good to receive the letters from residents who could talk more about Ashe House and how things changed over the period mentioned. It must also be interesting for those who now live in Woodpecker Glade to know what was on the land before their houses were built.

This month our history page is from a local man who has begun to write down a lot of his memories. It will be a precious resource for the future. If anyone else feels the urge to reminisce, we are happy to be the recipients of your musings!

As usual, we have a lot of events listed, including many musical options over June and July. There are some more unusual events too, such as a Patronal Festival and the open days at Meopham Windmill.

Knowing how good different herbs are for our gut, the Tuesday Club talk in Lower Halstow sounds very interesting, particularly as it will give practical insight for using them at home.

Victoria and Carol have done an excellent job, as usual, and Nature Notes once again gives us both advice and inspiration.

And finally, if anyone fancies a monthly walk and can deliver Action Forum at the same time, even if just one or two roads, we would much appreciate it. Thank you.

Letters to the Editor

Re: Pat Pollock

Dear Editor,
Our longstanding friend Pat Pollock, a former WREN, lived in Rainham and worked in Gillingham for several decades. She had many local friends.

Sadly, Pat recently passed away, up in Nottingham.

Any one who knew her and would like more details is welcome to phone me on:
01634234519.

Dennis Stewart

Rainham Community Awards 2026

Dear Editor,
Nominations for the Rainham Community Awards close on 31st July. This month is the last chance to nominate the people and places which make our community a special place.

Look out for our flyers and use the information on them to vote or nominate at:
<https://bit.ly/RCAwards2026>

Thanks in advance, Russell Poynter



Open Days at Meopham Windmill

Dear Editor,
We invite readers to visit our beautifully restored windmill to learn how to value our historic buildings and enjoy the 'rat trail'!

We are open, free, every Sunday in July from 1.30-4.30pm for guided tours. South Street (A227), Meopham Green, DA13 0QA. No booking is necessary.

Find out more on our Facebook page or at:
www.meophamwindmill.org.uk

St Mary Magdalene Patronal Festival

Dear Editor,
All are welcome to join us at Gillingham Green, ME7 1SS - service at 10.30am and again - 2.30pm for a presentation of local and church history, followed by a singalong with u3a's Acorns Singers, afternoon tea and raffle. Donations go towards the upkeep of

the church.

Many thanks, Brenda Bomers

Ashe House, Maidstone Rd

Dear Editor,

A friend of mine sent a copy of Action Forum, thinking I could possibly help. We used to live at 381 Maidstone Rd but sold out to Wards. They left the house as it was but used part of the garden for Woodpecker Glade and the back part of the garden for houses.

The main part of that estate was built in the grounds of Ashe House. This was owned by the Bodkins. He owned the removal firm Bodkins, whose offices were in Balmoral Rd Gillingham. I've looked them up on Google and found out they sold to Bournes, who I believe operate from Rye.

Hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely, Sheila Elvins
(nee Blinkhorn)

Ashe House, Maidstone Rd

Dear Editor,

Unfortunately I missed the article on Dr Drake/Ashe House in the May edition of AF but caught up once I read the article in the June edition.

I don't have a lot to add except that I moved with my family to 385 Maidstone Road in 1964/1965. It was a 1930s chalet bungalow.

I remember the Bodkins, who lived in Ashe House, 383 Maidstone Road. It seemed quite

grand as it was set back from the road, down a longish driveway and had a tennis court!

We understand that Mr Bodkin senior lived in 385 Maidstone Road until he passed away.

When Woodpecker Glade was in the planning stages, in the early 1970s, my father was approached by Wards. They wanted to buy our bungalow (and no doubt 381) in order to demolish and build new houses at the top of the entrance. He refused. That decision upset their plans quite a bit.

On their original build, all even numbered properties only started at no 6, as no's 2 and 4 were missing.

In later years we demolished the ageing 385 bungalow and built a property on Maidstone Rd in its place and a bungalow to the rear in Woodpecker Glade. The council allotted the new bungalow the address of no 2 Woodpecker Glade.

Our family have continuously been associated with the property at 385 since first moving in the mid 1960s.

Regards, Vicky Sweeney

Medway Mile

Dear Editor,

We invite readers to join thousands of others running, jogging and walking but also those simply enjoying the free sports activities, attractions and entertainment.

Fri 17th July, 5-9pm, ME7 1HF
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Community

Wigmore Voices choir summer concert

'Look at the world' in song.

Sat 27th June, 7.30pm, St Matthews
Community Centre, Drewery Dr, ME8 0PD

Tickets (refreshments included) £10,
available from Sue on 07990 837287

Upchurch Choral Society 'Come and Sing'

Sat 27th June, 9.30am - 4pm
St Mary's Church, Upchurch, ME9 7AL

£15 for the day, no need to read music.
£2 admission to the concert at 3.30pm.

Contact Liz Walters: 01634 361897 or
kbl.walters@talk21.com

Herbs for Health - a Tuesday Social talk

Join The Tuesday Social (Friends of St
Margaret's Church, Lower Halstow) for a
fascinating talk by Mandy Rickard. Over 25
year's experience as a medical herbalist and
aromatherapist, growing and using herbs for
her practice and running workshops teaching
how to use herbs at home.

She will chat about her experiences growing
and using herbs, bring a few plants to see
and smell and, hopefully, inspire us to
spread a little more greenery in our lives!
Time for questions will follow after.

Tues 30th June - 7.30pm
Memorial Hall, School Lane, ME9 7ES
£4 on the door (refreshments/raffle on offer).

Contact Liz on 01795 842272

Medway Repair Café

4th July - Gillingham Community Hub,
10.30am-1pm

Rainham WI

Rainham Cricket Club, 16th July, 1.45pm,
There is a small charge.
Pam - 01634 365789

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Parkwood/Lonsdale

Lubbock Walk (18), Lovelace Cl (39)
Holtwood Cl (16), Whitegate Ct (8)

Hempstead

Glenwood Cl (48), Hinton Cres (57)

Lower Halstow

Breach La (82), Burntwick Dr (52),
Crouch Hill Ct (32), Church Path (5),
Cumberland Rd (29), School La (98),
The Green (18), The Street (28),
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Community continued...

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Wigmore Voices Choir Open Evening

Come and join us for an evening of singing
along with the choir. If you enjoy singing
but are not sure if a choir is for you, come
and give it a go. It's free of charge, so there
is nothing to lose and maybe lots to gain.
Thurs 9th July at 8pm
St Matthews Community Centre, Drewery
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Nature Notes

July in the Wildlife-Friendly Garden

Looking back over weather from previous year's, as recorded in these articles, I see that my obsession is continuing, without any ability to modify what happens! My plan at present is to get into the garden when the weather permits, i.e. not too wet, not too hot. It looks as though I have a brief window for the early part of this week so will do some tidying and make some changes. Slugs and snails are really a problem this year, exacerbated by next door's cats being such great hunters of frogs! The snails have munched their way through two thriving patches of French marigolds, planted as companion plants, but their strong scent didn't work to save them.

Climber of the month

Star jasmine, *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, is growing and flowering well this year, and attracting bees even though it is not thought of as a plant for pollinators. For me, the only drawback is its strong scent, which is not to my taste.

The extra rain we have had recently has extended the season on my honeysuckle. As I mentioned before, many plants in my garden were dying slowly and quietly through lack of water.

My goodness, how things have grown this year! I notice that the *Magnolia stellata* has set seed again. I await to see if it will ripen.

Activity of the month

I think I need to inject more flowering shrubs into the garden and am drawn to plant more varieties of hebe as they flower over a long period and are very resilient.

I am thrilled that I have brought my rhubarb back from the brink by extra watering (and being lucky with plenty of rain)!

I recently tried a recipe for a rhubarb and orange cake that will be a nice addition to the cake menu for my friend's open gardens in July.

Open Gardens are such wonderful sources of inspiration. Keep your eyes open, for those that are wildlife-friendly.

Our grassy areas are really thriving after several years of autumn and winter cutting and planting of yellow rattle, followed by letting everything flower in spring and summer. The wild carrot is spreading and hosts a wide range of insects. Its long roots help to promote life deeper into the soil profile and provide pathways for water to penetrate. Chicory, with its pretty blue flowers acts in a similar manner.

Happy gardening,
Victoria Golding
(KWT, Wild About Gardens advisor)



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A walk from Barham across the downs

Summertime in England needs-a-grasping. The golden and long days are fleeting and precious, winter is always biting our tail feathers and sometimes, in our busy, hectic lives, it can pass us by altogether. The beauty of the countryside at this time of year can be something we only glimpse from a train window as we rush passed on our commute to elsewhere.

On a summer's day in June, I make the effort to get off the train, meet a friend and catch a bus to the village of Barham, a short ride outside Canterbury. We head up a steep lane from the village and set off on a trackway through the woods. The woodlands are owned by the Forestry Commission and we pass plantations of beech trees planted around 100 years ago as a national resource. Beech woods make good rifle butts so were essential during the WW1, at a time when blockades halted timber imports into the country. The trees grow close together in straight rows, only chinks of sunlight reaching the forest floor. These woods are eerily silent apart from the cooing of a wood pigeon in the gloom.

The plantation gives way to a semi-natural ancient wood and suddenly the air is full of bird song. 'Seep, seep, seep seep,' sing the coals tits while the song of the willow warblers lullaby down the scales. We pause for lunch under a spreading oak and listen to cuckoos

calling across the valley.

The path emerges into a meadow that stops us in our tracks. Clouds of ox-eye daisies rush to meet us and the path is edged by the tall baby pink spires of orchids, their leaves liver-spotted with dark splotches.

"Each flower looks like a little man," my friend exclaims. I look at him sceptically. "What sort of man?" I ask.

Each 'man' is wearing a bright pink hoody and a long billowing gown. Still, I'm not judging, they are a delight. The field is awash with colour and flowers neither of us can identify. We kneel amongst the profusion, competing to identify flowers using different apps.

"Lesser stitchwort," I call out as I wave my phone at a delicate white flower.

"Greater birds foot trefoil," my friend calls as he gazes at an egg yolk-coloured bloom. We are a strange mix of Victorian botanists with 21st century gadgets.

Still, as we make our way through country lanes, devoid of traffic, passed ancient churches and timber-framed cottages towards our rendezvous with a pint of cider in the Mermaid pub, it is easy to feel that you are back in some simpler world that is still there, just within reach, if you take the time to step off the train.

Carol Donaldson
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Climate Conversations

Cozenton Skate Park proposals

Plans are in place to revitalise and enhance the existing skate park, creating a better space for the local community. Proposed improvements include:

- Repairing/refurbishing current skate park
- Adding a brand-new extension
- Introducing a street-style skating area to complement the existing park
- Locating the extension where the current picnic table area sits

These upgrades will help create a more versatile and engaging space for skaters of all abilities but Medway want to hear your views on the proposals.

The public survey is open until Monday, 6 July 2026. Contribute on:

www.surveys.medway.gov.uk/snapwebhost/.asp?k=177921180367

Warmer Homes for Less - free upgrades

The weather might be rather warm at the moment but did you know, households can access this local grant, with funding up to £30,000 per property, if they are eligible?

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www.medway.gov.uk/

[energygrants#WarmHomesGrant](https://www.facebook.com/energygrants#WarmHomesGrant)

No-Mow May

This year, Medway Norse has been out mowing the verges and a number of the parks. It was rather surprising, given the past policy of 'No-Mow May'.

The Medway Climate Change website tells us that, following consultation with Plantlife and Kent Wildlife, the decision was made to naturalise some areas of our urban routes, assessing which plants are growing and allowing them to flourish. In Rainham that includes the A2, Deanwood Drive, Kings Frith, Hoath Way, Ito and Yokosuka Way. Other areas are then cut as and when maintenance is required.

An AI summary states,

'Instead of pausing all mowing for a month, Medway Norse and the council are actively allowing specific grass verges and designated rural roadsides to naturalise entirely into permanent wildflower habitats.'

Medway are continuing to push the initiative in gardens, with advice on how to increase and support the wildlife, particularly by resisting the urge to mow the lawn. Watch those wildflowers bloom!

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Rainham History

Life in Rainham by Clive Cobb

Rainham in the late fifties was not a village in the chocolate-box sense. It was a place in the middle of becoming something else and not entirely successfully. London overspill and council estates were pushing at its edges like rising dough. Fields and orchards were retreating year by year under brick and pebble-dash. Men who had once lived in cramped terraces in the towns suddenly found themselves in houses with gardens, indoor toilets and enough room to own lawnmowers.

Rainham existed because of work. The bus routes and railway station funnelled men every morning into the industrial sprawl of the Medway towns. Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester sounded separate on paper but, in truth, the dockyard stitched them together into one long industrial organism. The naval dockyard occupied not only land but the psychology of the place. Everything revolved around it. Fathers, uncles and neighbours built ships, repaired engines, machined steel and disappeared each morning carrying metal lunch tins and the expression of men prepared to spend eight hours being deafened.

The centre of Rainham was little more than a complicated crossroads pretending to be a town centre. St Margaret's Church stood there with the heavy permanence of something that had seen the Norman conquest, plague, civil war and Methodism come and go. Beside it sat the mock Tudor Cricketers pub, already looking faintly embarrassed by its own fake beams. Across from that was the Royal Cinema, which

carried the glamorous promise of America into Kent six days a week along with news-reels and popcorn, though not on Sunday.

Station Road ran from the crossroads down towards the river Medway, although people romantically called it 'the sea'. On the corner stood the Barclay's Bank and, opposite, another bank whose architecture suggested absolute confidence in the future and absolutely no understanding of parking.

The Co-op occupied two separate buildings split between the High Street and Station Road as though uncertain whether commerce itself would survive. Further north were the smaller shops that formed the true nervous system of the town: Reed Brothers the barbers, where every haircut looked government issued. Green's toy and bicycle shop, which smelled magnificently of rubber tyres, oil and cardboard, Lyle Brothers grocery shop with wooden shelves and men in brown coats weighing things on scales that appeared capable of measuring coal or babies with equal authority. Then there was the dry cleaners with shirts rotating mysteriously behind steamed windows like trapped ghosts.

By the late fifties the old England had not disappeared, but you could see it losing ground street by street. The ancient Kent of orchards, hop fields and village life was being overtaken by buses, mortgages, television aerials and men coming home from shift work wanting a better life for their children without having the faintest idea what that better life might actually look like.

to be continued...

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Dates for the Diary

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

27th June - 'Come and Sing' with Upchurch Choral Society, ending the day with a short concert. Booking required, £15 for the day, £2 for concert, St Mary's Church, Upchurch, ME9 7AL, Liz - kbl.walters@talk21.com

27th June - Wigmore Voices summer concert, 'Look at the World', 7.30pm, St Matthew's Community Centre, ME8 0PD, £10pp including refreshments, Sue on 07990 837287

30th June - 'Herbs for Health' with Tuesday Social Club and Mandy Rickard, 7.30pm, £4, Memorial Hall, Lower Halstow, see p7 for more.

3rd/4th July - 'The Show Must Go On', a musical with St Paul's Drama Group, 7.30pm, 01634 852712, www.stpaulsdramagroup.co.uk or ticketsource.co.uk/spdg

4th July - Repair Café, Gillingham Community Hub, 10.30am - 1pm

5th July - RSPB Medway guided walk, St Margaret's Bay and Bockhill, 10am, CT15 6DT, group.rspb.org.uk/medway

5th July - Afternoon Teas, St Michaels and All Angels, Hartlip, ME9 7TL, lovely views across the orchards

6th July - 'Happy Hour' singing group, Lower Halstow, 6.30pm, Memorial Hall, ME9 7ES, Liz - 01795 842272

8th July - RSPB Medway guided walk, Huckling Estate Woodlands, 10am, ME17 1QT, group.rspb.org.uk/medway

8th July - 'Grace Darling' by George Wildridge with East Medway u3a, St Paul's, Parkwood Green, ME8 9PN, 2pm, daisy: membership.eastmedway@gmail.com

9th July - Wigmore Voices open evening, come and sing with the choir, 8pm, St Matthew's Community Centre, Drewery Dr, ME8 0PD, Roger - 07774 457001

12th July - Music from the Stage with Upchurch Choral Society, 7.30pm, St Mary's Upchurch, £14 on door

13th July - Medway Music Club w Chris Powell, Parkwood Community Centre, 7pm, refreshments/bar, £10, phil.burt@ntlworld.com or 07795 576294

15th July - BWAG Club Night (speaker to be announced) 7.30pm, Blacksmith's Barn, ME7 3JU, £5 on door, refreshments, 07772 920359/info@bwag.org.uk

16th July - Rainham WI, Berengrave Cricket Club, 1.45pm, contact Pam on 01634 365789

16th July - Bogs and Shady Borders with Sue Marshall, Wigmore & Bredhurst Garden Club, 1.45pm, Howard Memorial Hall, ME8 0PN, call 07531 624679.

19th July - BWAG Woodland Task Day with a butterfly survey, 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

19th July - RSPB Medway guided walk, Hothfield Heathlands, 10am, TN26 1HD, group.rspb.org.uk/medway

20th July - 'Happy Hour' singing group, Lower Halstow, 6.30pm, Memorial Hall, ME9 7ES, Liz - 01795 842272

Civil Service Bowling Club, situated next to Everlast Gyms (previously ROKO), Gillingham Business Park. Roll Ups on a Tues afternoon starting at 2pm or Thurs evenings starting at 6pm, csbowls@gmail.com or 07598 922059

Detling Short Mat bowls club, three sessions each week, 7.30pm Mon, 2 pm on Tues and Fri, £3, incl 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

Monthly Men's Breakfast Club in Rainham Millennium Centre (1st Sat) or St Margaret's Church (3rd Sat), both at 9am.

Not religious, it is about men's mental health - joining together for fellowship, talk and a breakfast (18 or over). Phone the church on 01634 362 023 or email simon@rainhamchurch.co.uk

The Happy Hour singing group with Friends of St Margaret's Church, all age, all ability, every 1st and 3rd Mon of the month at 6.30pm, Memorial Hall, School Lane, Lower Halstow ME9 7ES.

For further information call Liz: 07730893747 or email Gill: gilliangay99@yahoo.co.uk

3rd Rainham North Brownies, for girls aged 7-10, offering fun, learning, adventure and new challenges, RMGS each Thurs eve, find us on Facebook or email: 3rdrainhamnorthbrownies@gmail.com

Rochester Dementia Support Group, St Peter's Church Parish Centre, Delce Road, Rochester
Singing for Memory - 2nd Fri of the mth, 2-3.30pm
Dementia Café - 4th Fri of the mth, 1.30-3.30pm
Carers Support Group - 2nd Tues of the mth at Coffee Shop, 10-11.30am
Dementia Worship on 2nd Tues of the mth 2.30-3.30pm
St Justus, The Tideway Rochester, 07905 357247.

A Splash of Paint art group, Thurs morn, 9.30am, Bredhurst Village Hall, Karen on 07986 356977.

Gillingham Horticultural Society Floral Art Gp, 1st and 3rd Tues of mth, 7.30pm, United Reformed Church rear hall, Balmoral Rd, £30 per annum but first session is free, Kaye - 01634 232998/07592048953 or kayebuss@btinternet.com

Board Games Morning, Fri, 10.30am, Twydall Community Hub and Library

Medway Volunteer Workshop - We refurbish tools, sewing machines, knitting machines, computers, to go to Africa for job creation. Various volunteers needed, come for a half or whole day, Mon-Fri, behind Elm Court Garden Centre, 01634 390400

St Matthew's Place of Welcome, Thurs informal drop-in, 10am, geoff.hufton@hotmail.co.uk

Check out www.thenet.uk.net/events

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