

ACTION FORUM

AN INDEPENDENT MONTHLY FOR RAINHAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

DEC
2025

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Brrr - it was cold back then!



Photo of Hidsons Garage in the Winter of 1962-63
by Dennis Hector Reynolds, late of Suffolk Avenue.

(kindly provided by Stephen Hales)

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Editorial

Our cover photo shows Hidsons garage in a severe winter - a picture hidden away before being shared with us. The worst snow I can remember was 1987 but some readers will have memories of the 1963 winter and how Rainham coped - please get in touch if so. It's great to see photos of the past that have never previously seen the light of day. If we don't have space in AF, we can share to a wider audience on the Rainham History website.

We've had lots of emails on articles, in particular regarding the Howard School. There seem to be some different views, perhaps depending whether you were placed in the Alpha or Grammar stream.

A couple of readers let us know about the walk to Hartlip, with rather differing outcomes! It's great to get your feedback so please keep us updated.

The Year of Music in Rainham, organised by St Margaret's Church, has continued with more great lineups. The Queen tribute band sold out and gave an incredible performance, with songs you'd never expect to hear in church! It was heartening to see so hopefully the level of support will encourage further events next year.

Medway Council have been very prompt in getting the Christmas lights fitted in the town centre - so early, they were in place before Halloween! It still seems a long way off as I write in early November but we've a lot of Christmas events in the diary and details of the local church services to attend as well. Our next edition is the joint Jan/Feb one so, in the meantime, we'd like to wish all our readers and advertisers a Happy Christmas and we'll see you in the New Year.

Letters to the Editor

A Walk to Hartlip (Nov issue)

Dear Editor,
 Just a short note to tell you that I tried the walk as described and completed it successfully!

A dry, sunny day, nothing notable seen but pleasant all the same. I did the first half in 50 minutes, stopped for a short break in the Rose & Crown and then the return leg in about 55 minutes. A tricky bit through the "variety of vegetation" after the crossroads at Bryony School but otherwise all good.

John Coppen

PS Since we have not gone metric on our roads, it might have been helpful to have the distance to be walked in miles but I understand OS maps use 1km grid squares.

A Walk to Hartlip (Nov issue)

It's said good things often come in small packages and that applies to Action Forum. I was pleased to see the directions for a walk to Hartlip. Here was an opportune moment to take advantage of fine weather rather than hang about waiting for the car service to be completed.

All started well but it wasn't long before ambiguous directions had me backtracking. Whilst I appreciate the author had to meet a limited word count, it is no excuse for directions that are not explicit or are misleading. Footpath numbers are quoted but none are physically present on the signage. Where instructions were given to 'cross diagonally' or 'continue diagonally' - is that left to right/ right to left? Ambiguity probably added an extra km or two onto the route.

The article didn't reflect the conditions I found so what should have been a pleasurable walk turned out to be a frustrating one, due to inaccurate and presumptive narrative. I would suggest that future articles to encourage a bit of rambling are more accurate than the one provided.

Kind regards, Steve Whitethread

The editorial team apologises for shortening instructions from A James and, thus, causing confusion.



Howard School Memories (Nov issue)

Dear Action Forum,
I read E Barton's piece about the Howard School in the Nov 2025 edition. I thought I'd share my memories - which are different from those reflected in the piece.

Firstly, some prior history. Rainham Boys Secondary had been in Orchard Street along with Rainham Girls until they both moved to 'The Campus site' off Derwent Way in 1967. St Margaret's Infants and Juniors then moved from the top of Station Road to the Orchard Street site. The old school building served as a community centre until the Oast at the station superseded it. It was then demolished and the Shopping Centre built.

The Howard was formed in 1975 with the merger of Rainham Boys and Gillingham Grammar which had been based at Third Ave (now Rober Napier) since the 1930s. This was an attempt by Kent County Council to deflect growing national calls to abandon selective education by having a 'bi-lateral comprehensive' as a single school but with streams following different curriculums. It was named after a Mrs Howard who was a councillor involved in education at that time. John Hicks who had been the head of the grammar school was its first headmaster.

I had gone from St Margarets to the Grammar in 1974 so was the last year to start at the old site. In Sept 1975 we all moved to the new Howard School which used the old Rainham

Boys buildings with some new blocks added. Having been ex-grammar, I was in the Alpha stream, starting in 2a2. Many of my ex-St Margaret's friends were in the A stream. The timetable adopted originally was the old grammar school one, hence the long day, but soon in the first year the afternoons were cut back so we left at 3:30pm.

There was some of the sense of 'us and them' between the streams when we started. But many 'α boys' preferred that football was on the PE curriculum where previously it was only rugby and hockey in the winter. I certainly don't remember being treated with any additional respect by the teachers, who regularly threw wooden board rubbers at your head or hit you with keys spun on a long chain if you weren't 'on task'.

There were opportunities to mix with Rainham Girls in extra-curricular activities, music especially, which I enjoyed. I remember several performances with pupils from both schools. In 6th Form there was the youth club where, just before I left, I met the girl who later became my wife. On leaving, I went onto a training scheme with GEC Avionics (now BAE Systems).

In 2001, my son enrolled at The Howard, without taking the Medway Test as it then was. The school was brilliant for him and he left to study Physics and later a PhD at Leicester University.

Regards, Graham Hunt

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Sat 6th Dec and Sat 20th Dec
10am - 2pm
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Christmas Toy Appeal Toy Service

7th December
Bring new toys to donate:
9.30am, St. Mary's Café Church, Gillingham Green ME7 1SS
11am St. Barnabas' Communion Service, Nelson Road ME7 4ST

Upchurch Choral Society Christmas

Sunday 7th Dec, 7.30pm, St Mary's,
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The Victoria Palace with Dean Caston, followed by tea/coffee and biscuits and time to socialize.

10th December, 7pm
St Margarets Millennium Centre, ME8 9BH
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Nature Notes

No 9 – A Journey through the winter dark

November has been a month of leaden skies and damp days. The clocks turn and we turn inwards, away from the summer bright garden. For many it can be a tough time of year as the darkness descends early and the light barely seems to break the horizon, even at midday. The long gloaming of winter is upon us and it seems to press some of us closer to the earth.

But, even during the darkest times, nature can see us through. During the winter lock down of 2020, I cycled every evening from my home in Rainham to the reedbeds of Motney Hill to watch the amazing murmuration of starlings which swirled en masse in the skies; expanding and contracting, twisting and spiralling above the estuary skies, like avian fireworks. One of the great spectacles of nature taking place feet from the snarled-up traffic on the Lower road. The starlings kept me going during the difficult days following bereavement, a small miracle at the end of my street that temporarily lifted my heart every evening.

Now, five years later, I have been going through another dark time but, each morning, I rise early and sit at first light in my garden with a cup of hot coffee and wait for the

jackdaws to fly over, clack clacking with a sharp metallic sound as they fly out of their night roost in the trees that border the edge of town.

The sparrows wait, in the hedge surrounding my garden, the one that I refuse to cut lower despite the benign pressure of neighbours urging me to do so. They hang like early Christmas baubles in the hawthorn tree, chattering to each other and their homely faces make me smile.

Goldfinches arrive in a twitter, their call, like a dash of sunshine in the growing dawn. They bathe in the shallows of the small garden pond that I dug earlier this year, all flashing golden wings and punk rocker hairdos as the water ruffles their feathers. The site of them enjoying a little habitat that I have created brings me joy, JOY in capitals. As the light grows, a late bumblebee searches the last of the deep purple flowers of salvia for a dash of energy-rich nectar to see it through the winter.

It reminds me that nature perseveres, even in these months of gloom. It goes through the darkness, as sometimes we must do, to emerge once again into spring.

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December in the Wildlife-Friendly Garden

Already, across the country, we are seeing the dangers of climate change. Storm Claudia didn't impact us much here in Kent but the effect of a month's worth of rain in a couple of days illustrates again that building on the flood plains is a recipe for disaster. The water suppliers and regulators need to do more work to hold the water on the land nearer the source of rivers. We need this in Kent as much as any county. Kent Wildlife Trust has recently purchased land which the River Teise runs through. This gives us a great opportunity to rewet the landscape and re-establish the old meanders. As the Teise is part of the Medway river system, working with others will help to ameliorate the flooding we often experience. In our own gardens we can do our bit to help by having permeable bases to our hard standing areas, avoiding concreting more than we need and restoring our front gardens from concrete to areas that will soak up water, allowing it to go back into the aquifer, rather than running into the overloaded drains.

Shrub of the month

Providing natural food for birds through all your garden is a valuable thing to do, especially as birds congregating in a small area encourages the spread of avian influenza. Check whether your Cotoneaster, Pyracantha, Elder, or other berry bearing shrubs are producing abundant fruit.

If not, they may benefit from pruning after the current berries have been eaten.

Cornus mas "Golden glory", otherwise known as Cornelian cherry, is a great winter-flowering shrub, followed by fruits in the autumn.

Jobs of the month

Get out into the garden when you can, keeping warm, dry and well shod! Carry secateurs, a tub for rubbish and just do the one thing in front of you that needs it most.

Clean greenhouse glass to keep light levels as high as possible, keep adding leaves to the leaf mould and grass to the compost, along with paper shreds.

Keep paths clear and clean, grass edges neat and your garden will look a million dollars! Mulch borders and wherever there is bare soil.

Check out the Kent Wildlife Trust Shop to give gifts that support wildlife, from reusable coffee cups to Wildlife Safaris: kentwildlife.shop

Have a very Happy Christmas and a New Year full of Wildlife Gardening and Nature!

Victoria Golding
(KWT, Wild About Gardens advisor)

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Community Christmas

Christmas Services Around Rainham



Holy Trinity, Twydall Lane

7th Dec, 10am - Christingle
 14th Dec, 4pm - 9 Lessons and Carols
 24th Dec, 4pm - 'Finding Jesus' nativity (based on Finding Nemo!)
 24th Dec, 11.30pm - Midnight Communion
 25th Dec, 10am - Christmas Cafe

St. Margaret's Rainham

19th Dec, 7.30pm - Beer & Carols *Sold Out*
 20th Dec, 7.30pm - Beer & Carols *Sold Out*
 21st Dec, 6.30pm - Carols by Candlelight
 24th Dec, 9.30am - Quiet Space
(open for anyone who feels alone or carrying even the smallest of sorrow. Whether you wish to sit in silence, pray alone or with others, reflect, or just take a moment away from the noise, you will be met with kindness and understanding)
 24th Dec, 10.30am - Holy Communion
 24th Dec, 1pm - Christmas Eve Crib Service
 24th Dec, 4pm - Christmas Eve Crib Service
 24th Dec, 11pm - Midnight Mass
 25th Dec, 10.30am - Celebration Service

St Margaret's, Lower Halstow

7th Dec, 3pm - Christingle
 21st Dec, 3pm - Carol Service
 24th Dec, 1-3pm - Quiet Christmas
 24th Dec, 3.30pm - Crib Service
 24th Dec, 11.30pm - Midnight Communion
 25th Dec, 10am - Communion

Rainham Christian Fellowship, Waltham Rd

14th Dec, 10.30am - Family Service
 21st Dec, 4pm - Candlelit Carol Service

St Peter's, Bredhurst

24th Dec, 3pm - Crib Service
 25th Dec, 10.30am - Holy Communion

St. Mary's, Upchurch

7th Dec, 10am - Gift Service
 24th Dec, 4pm - Crib Service
 24th Dec, 7pm - Carol Service
 25th Dec, 10am - Communion

St Augustine of Canterbury, Parkwood

14th Dec, 3pm - Family Singalong
 24th Dec, 6pm - Mass
 24th Dec, 8.30pm - Carol Service
 24th Dec, 9pm - Mass
 25th Dec, 10am - Mass

St Matthew's, Wigmore

22nd Dec, 6.30pm - Carols among the Trees
 24th Dec, 3pm/5pm - Christingle Service

St Paul's, Parkwood

7th Dec, 10.30am - Toy Service
 21st Dec, 10.30am - 9 Lessons & Carols
 24th Dec, 11.30pm - Holy Communion

Twydall Evangelical, Goudhurst Rd

6th Dec, 10.30am - Christmas Fayre
 21st Dec, 4pm - Carol Service

Granary Church, Oast Community Centre

21st Dec, 3pm - Carol Service & Festive Refreshments (transport - 07791555721)
 25th Dec, 10.30am - Christmas Service

All Saints, Hempstead

20th Dec, 3pm - Blue Christmas
 24th Dec, 3pm - Christingle

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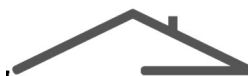
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Father Christmas

Rotary Club of Gillingham Christmas Floats



Wed 10 Dec - start Taverners Rd, 6pm

Taverners, Bettescombe, Elmstone, Bettescombe, Arthur, Maidstone, Herbert, Lonsdale, Broadview

Fri 12 Dec - start Edwin Rd/Sylvan Rd, 6pm
Edwin, Durham, Maidstone, Lyndhurst, Marshall, Platters

Sat 13 Dec - ASDA, Pier Rd, 9am-5pm

Mon 22 Dec - start junc Eastcourt/Broadway, 6pm

Elmfield, Featherby, Chilham, Eastcourt, Allington, Broadway, Priory, Abbey, Featherby, Hanway, The Chase, Chattenden, Broadway

Sat 20 Dec - ASDA, Pier Rd, 9am-5pm

Don't forget that these dates and routes are all subject to change due to weather or roadworks

Gillingham Lions Santa Sleigh Runs



Mon 8th - Hempstead
Barncroft, Hempstead, Almond, Magdalen, Lavenda, Birch, Plumtree, Medlar, Cedar, Kingsdown

Tues 9th - Hempstead
Coppergate, Evergreen, Sheperdgate, Honey, Lamplighters, Cobblestone, Horseshoe, Old Barn, Greenfinches, Everglades

Wed 10th - Kenilworth
Kenilworth, Windermere, Sandown, Bransgore, Sunningdale, Wimbourne, Tanker, Gayhurst

Thurs 11th - Fairview

Fairview, Foulds, Primrose, Magnolia, Clematis, Norman, Wigmore, The Hazels, Woodside, Bredhurst

Fri 12th - Highfield

Highfield, Benson, Derwent, Oldfields, Salisbury, Century, Nursery, Henley, Cheriton

Mon 15th - Parkwood

Campleshon, Wood, Queendown, Lineacre, Idenwood, Hallwood, Donet, Dixwell, Long Catlis, Fairfax, Foxburrow, Readscoft, Beke

Tues 16th - Parkwood

Capel, Gunnis, Galdwyn, Culpepper, Conrad, Chipstead, Long Catlis, Hawbeck, Roper, Sedley, Deanwood

Wed 17th - Twydall

Waltham, Elham, Lyminge, Bodiam, Sturry, Herne, Blean, Patricxbourne, Detling, Hawthorn, Begonia

Thurs 18th - Twydall

Staplehurst, Goudhurst, Ash, Leeds, Charing, Lynsted, Bearsted, Westerham, Minster, Crundale

Fri 19th - Lower Beechings

Eastcourt, Littlebourne, Bishopsbourne, Kennington, Brabourne, Kingsnorth, Thornham, Rolvenden, Ruckinge, Boughton

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SLIMMING WORLD

Dates for the Diary

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

28th Nov - 'The Yalding Floods' with Medway Geographical Society, 2pm, URC, Balmoral Rd, ME7 4PU, £4, 01634 389916 or vwoollett@hotmail.co.uk

29th Nov - Christmas Carols with Salvation Army, Rainham Precinct, 10am-12pm, donations welcomed

29th Nov - Christmas Fayre, 11am-1pm, St. Mary Magdalene, Gillingham Green, ME7 1SS

3rd Dec - Bredhurst Charity Shop Christmas Bonanza starts, every Wed/Sat till 20th, 1.30-3.30pm, ME7 3JZ, 07842 216116

6th Dec - Rainham Food and Craft Market, The Oast, Granary Close, Rainham, 10am-2pm, dog/family friendly

6th Dec - Repair Café, Strood Comm Hub, 10.30-1

6th Dec - Forever Elton perform Crocodile Rock, St Matthew's Community Centre, Wigmore, 6.30pm, £15, BYO refreshments, www.eventbrite.com or after the services each Sunday

6th Dec - Maidstone and Medway Sinfonia concert 'A Night at the Opera & Festive Flavour', 7.30pm, St Martin's Church, ME15 7LP, £14 from www.ticketsource.co.uk or cash on door, under 18's free

7th Dec - Salvation Army Christmas Toy Appeal, St Mary's Café Church, Gillingham Green, 9.30am service or St Barnabas Communion service, 11am

7th Dec - RSPB Medway guided walk, Leysdown on Sea, 10am, ME12 4RJ, group.rspb.org.uk/medway

7th Dec - Upchurch Choral Society Christmas Concert, St Mary's, ME9 7AL, 7.30pm, interval refreshments, £12

10th Dec - 'The Victoria Palace' with Dean Caston, £4, Millenium Centre, 7pm, 01634 263622

10th Dec - Medway Music Club w Michael Wooldridge and trumpeter, Richard Baker, Parkwood Community Centre, 7.30pm, refreshments/bar, £10, phil.burt@ntlworld.com or 07795 576294

13th Dec - Wigmore Voices present 'Christmas Sparkles', 7.30pm, St Matthew's Community Centre, Wigmore, £10, contact Sue 07990 837287

16th Dec - 'the Rails of North and East Kent - Birding by Train' with Keven Thornton, RSPB Indoor Talk, Parkwood Community Centre, 7pm, info.rspbmedway@gmail.com

17th Dec - RSPB Medway guided walk, Riverside Country Park, 10am, ME7 2XH, group.rspb.org.uk/medway

20th Dec - Christmas Carols with Salvation Army, Rainham Precinct, 10am-12pm, donations welcomed

20th Dec - Rainham Food and Craft Market Christmas Special, The Oast, Granary Close, Rainham, 10am-2pm

12th Jan - Medway Music Club w David Harrild, Parkwood Community Centre, 7.30pm, refreshments/bar, £10, phil.burt@ntlworld.com or 07795 576294

17th Jan - Repair Café, Strood Comm Hub, 10.30-1

Check out www.thenet.uk.net/events

21st Jan - Wigmore Ladies Club, 2pm, every 3rd Wed, Howard Memorial Hall, Woodside, Call 07943 178362

21st Jan - BWAG Club Night, 7.30pm, Blacksmith's Barn, B'hurst, ME7 3JU, 07772 920359/
info@bwag.org.uk

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

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

HempstARA Art Club, 2nd and 3rd Tues of mth, Scout Hall, £7, 07710 406154/01634 389054

Medway Aircraft Preservation Society (MAPSL), restoring vintage aircraft at Rochester Airport, visitors welcome Mon, Wed, Sun from 9.30am, contact www.mapsl.com

Art Group, Tuesdays, 10am, Twydall Comm Hub

The Music Man Project, accessible music education Sarah Mann, 07909515439 mmpkent@gmail.com

Wigmore Voices choir, Thurs 8pm, St Matthew's Community Centre, Roger 07774 457001 wigmorevoices.weebly.com

Sunbeams Baby and Toddler Music Gp, every Tues, 1.45pm, All Saints, Hempstead, sjcross13@outlook.com

Medway Watersports Centre, sails@medwaywatersports.co.uk

Oast House Badminton, each Tues, 7pm, £5pp, cescottie@hotmail.com

Medway Towns Bands, every Tues and Wed, Hempstead Infants, contact mail@medwaytownsbands.co.uk 01474 745318

Medway Towns Footpath Group, walks each Sun, 10am, medwaytfg@gmail.com, medwaytownsfootpathgroup.co.uk

Oast House Community Choir, every Tues, 10-11.30, Rainham Oast, £5, Bob Carling on 07800 522724

Rainham Volleyball Club, Tues 7-9pm, Sun 6-8pm, Rainham Girls, contact 07772 593674

See My Voice mini's Sundays, Rainham Social Club, Station Rd, Ages 3-10, 11-12pm, £2 pp, 07383 915872

Breathe Easy Medway (those with a lung condition), 1st Tues of mth (Feb-Dec), 1-3pm, Twydall Community Centre, ME8 6TQ, newmembers@breatheeasyway.co.uk/ 07775 461573

East Medway u3a, 2nd Wed each month, 2pm, Smallholders Club, Wigmore, membership.eastmedway@gmail.com

Scottish Country Dancing, Mon, 1.30pm, Bredhurst Village Hall, Thurs - 8pm, St Thomas of Canterbury, Rainham, www.medwaycaledonians.co.uk, £3

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