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HIGHAM PARK STATELY HOME AND GARDENS

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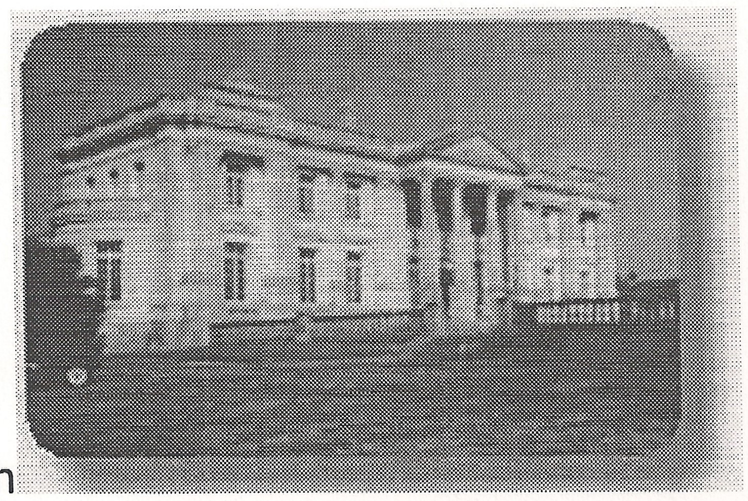

Use A2 exit sign Bridge, Higham Park at top of Bridge Hill

Photos by kind permission of Higham Park

Dating back to the 1320's, Higham Park is a stately home with landscaped gardens. Ceded to the de Hegham family by Edward II it was later owned by Thomas Culpepper, the herbalist and author.

The garden is a passionately restored ornate Peto designed landscape inclding ethereal yew-lined Italian water garden, intimate secret and vibrantly scented sunken rose gardens, unique variety of tree and plant specimens and Kent's oldest acers. Profuse carpets of daffodils and *Anemone blanda* enhance romantic classical stately home c1320

In the 1920s, the estate was owned by Count Louis Zboroswki, a motor racing enthusiast whose first racing car *Chitty 1* was the inspiration for the film *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Before his death racing at Monza in the Italian Grand Prix, Count Louis conceived the idea of a 15" narrow gauge railway with his friend and fellow-enthusiast Captain J E P Howey. This dream was subsequently realised as the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway.

Open under the National Gardens Scheme (11 am - 5 pm)

Sunday 30 March 2003
Wednesday 17 September 2003

Admission £3.50, children £1.50

Text (1 of 19) in **Higham Park Stately Home and gardens**

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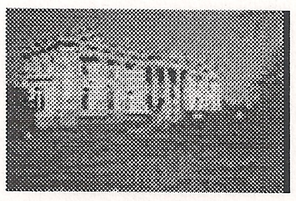
HIGHAM PARK OPENING TIMES



HIGHAM PARK WILL BE OPEN FROM THE 1ST APRIL TO 31ST OCTOBER 11AM TO 6PM

OPEN:
1st April to 31st October 2000
Monday,Tuesday,Wednesday,Thursday & Sunday 11am to 6pm

GROUP VISITS BY APPOINTMENT

TEAS AND LUNCHES SERVED IN THE CARD ROOM

HIGHAM PARK-An important stately home with landscape gardens dating back to the 1320's. A detailed history of distinguished past owners helps bring this beautiful Palladian building back to life for enthusiasts who are invited to tour the house and grounds from 21st March 1999 to the 26th September. Garden entrance £2.50, House tours £1.50. Tea and gift shops available. The estate was ceded to the 'De Hegham' family by Edward II (1320). The family, then courtiers to the King, by this held lands south of Canterbury stretching as far as Wingham to the east and Upper Hardres to the west. These vast estates were passed to Thomas Culpepper of Bedgebury, the famous author and herbalist, during the reign of Henry VIII (1534). Evidence of his early experimental plantings can still be found within the kitchen gardens. The property was later occupied by Sir Anthony Aucher and then passed on to his son, Sir William, who died without issue in 1726. Sir William's sister, however, had a daughter who in turn married one Ignatius Geoghegan; during their period together they commissioned (1768) the building of Higham's neo-classical, four column façade as we see it today. Finished in Portland stone, which was quarried in Cornwall and shipped in huge quantities, it was intricately shaped and carved by hand on site. James Hallet took control of the estate later that century (1781), evidence of which can be seen at the National Gallery. Gainsborough's painting, 'The Morning Walk', depicts the Hallet family in elegant dress strolling though Higham's summer gardens. Jane Austen, the author, along with her sister also visited the Hallet family home at this time, their outings being mentioned in Cassandra's Jottings. In 1823 Higham again changed hands, this time to James Hallet's nephew, Charles. Charles, having now assumed the surname 'Hughes-Hallet', married Frances Anne, daughter of Sir Edward Katchbull, the 8th Bart of Mersham Hatch. The Reverent James Hughes-Hallet lived in the house from 1846 and portraits of his family, painted by Sanges, were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1854. London banker, William Gay, purchased the estate in 1901. As a great collector of rare plants and orchids, Higham's Edwardian gardens were completed as we see them today under his stewardship. The Italian Water Garden, designed by Harold Peto, was also completed around this time. Shortly after, following the tragic death of her husband, Countess Margaret Zborowska, the wealthy grand daughter of William Waldorf Astor, took over the estate. Her intent, to provide a stable English

family home from which to educate and bring up her son, was sadly short-lived. The Countess, having suffered ill health throughout her life, died in the same year that she moved to Higham. Count Louis Vorrow Zborowski, at just 16 years of age inherited great wealth and burning ambition - to follow his late father's great passion as a racing car driver. During the 1920's, Higham became the unlikely venue from where the world's most ambitious racing cars were both conceived and built. The world's first aero-engined racing cars, later immortalised by Fleming's fantasy film 'Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang', were the brain-child of Count Louis. His well chronicled racing exploits, then typical of the amateur status of drivers during the early part of this century, were undoubtedly responsible for attracting the aristocracy to the sport in later years. Count Louis' 'Racing Green', for example, is now universally accepted as the standard livery for classic British racing cars. The Count died at just 28 years of age, racing for Mercedes Benz at Monza in Italy. The latest creation from his workshops, the Higham Special, was passed on to his friend Parry Thomas, who later took it to the Pendine sands in South Wales where it broke the World speed record. The car, renamed 'Babs', now has its own museum at Pendine. The Count's virtually unlimited resources and intrigue for all things mechanical meant that he could also exercise his passion for speed in other directions. The now famous Hythe and Dymchurch Narrow Gauge Miniature Railway was originally born at Higham and originally circled the landscape gardens. With his friend, Captain Howie, the Green Goddess engine would pull its carriages to such a speed that it would regularly topple off its track. The Higham Park estate was sold to Sir Walter Wigham,, a merchant banker and governor of the Bank of England, in 1928. Sir Walter was married to a French Countess from the Saligoncic Fenelon family. They changed the name of the estate to Highland Court during the 1930's. It continued under this name while under the control of the War Office during the Second World War (1939 - 1945) and during its tenure as part of the Kent and Canterbury Hospital (1951). This section of the Hospital was closed in 1981. The estate subsequently fell into disrepair. Under new ownership since 1995 and having resumed its original name, a painstaking and comprehensive restoration began in the autumn of that year and continues today.

COUNTRY LIVING MAGAZINE GUIDE TO RURAL ENGLAND SOUTHEAST OF ENGLAND

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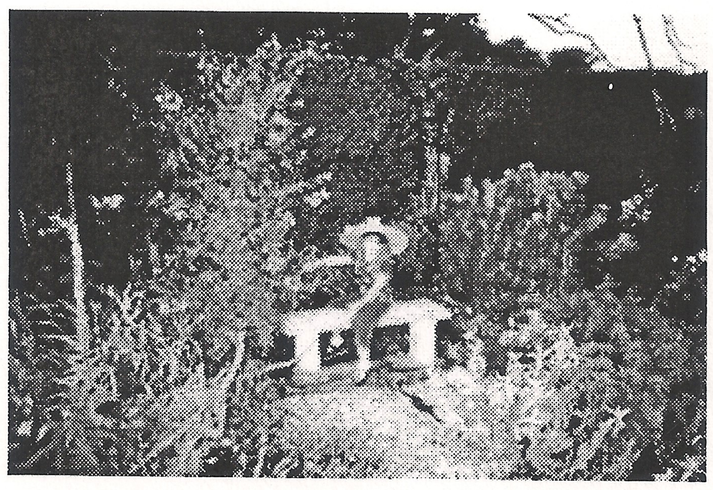
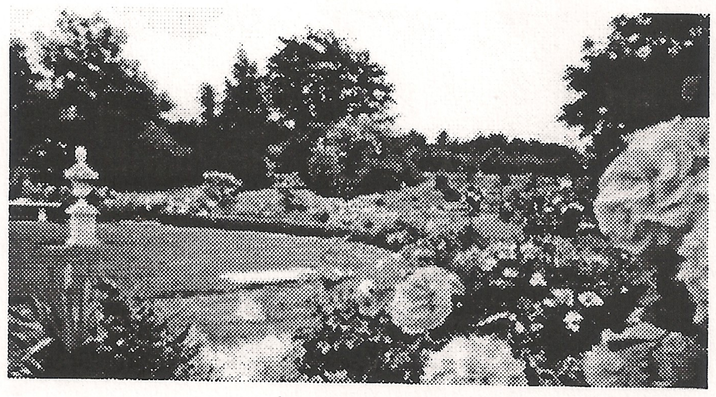
When Amanda Harris Deans and Patricia Gibb first visited the almost derelict **Higham House** in 1994, they had no idea that this house would become for them a labour of love consuming all their waking hours. One of England's most beautiful country houses, fronted by a magnificent four columned neo-classical façade in Portland stone, its past can be traced back to the 14th century. Although it captured their hearts, it was in a parlous state when they first saw it, with crumbling masonry, collapsed ceilings, dry rot in the roof and 25 acres of neglected undergrowth which had once been a beautiful garden. Amanda and Patricia pooled their resources and to their surprise their modest offer was accepted. The house was theirs and the concept of leisure disappeared from their lives.



Gradually the pair, whose gardening knowledge was minimal, have laid out and restored acres of formal gardens, embellishing them with rare plants in complex patterns. Among the delights of the garden is the replacement of garden follies, such as the attractive Classical Temple in the Peto designed Yew hedged Italian Water garden and a beautiful stag on a most appropriate base. Colour and delightful scents now abound from the huge drifts of golden daffodils in early spring, followed by the pink hues of 2,500 tulips and alliums, through the richness of summer until the leaves fall in the splendour of autumn.

Inside, the task of restoration was equally challenging. Patricia and Amanda have turned their hands to most trades as they have painstakingly scratched out the thick paint deposits masking the fine detail of the plaster mouldings, ground off the cement covering the Portland stone floor of the hallway and replaced the tiles blown off



the roof in a gale. They've now opened the house to the public and, as with the garden, part of the pleasure of a visit to Higham House is seeing this wonderful historic house rise phoenix-like from the ashes of dereliction.

Amanda on a house tour, explains the trials and tribulations of Higham; history comes to life from 1320 with Edward II, Thomas Culpepper, Countess Margaret Zborowski (nee Aster) and her son Louis, creator of the legendary Chitty Chitty Bang Bang racing cars that inspired Ian Fleming, who stayed at Higham, to write about Chitty and 007 James Bond. If your schedule is too hectic you can just visit for coffee, succulent light lunches or scrumptious afternoon teas with home-made scones, cakes and jams.

Higham is just off the A2 at Bridge between Canterbury and the Channel ports. Open April to September, Sundays to Thursdays 11.00am - 5.00pm. Admission prices at time of press: House tour £2.00, Gardens £3.00. Group rates also available.

Travel Publishing Ltd

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