

WATER RUNS THROUGH THE



Soldiers and sandbags on the street as rivers hit peak levels

As flooding misery continued, the Army was drafted in to help. And although the calm after the storm has brought some respite, homes are still under threat. Lowri Stafford reports



STREETS AS RAIN LASHES DOWN AGAIN



MAIN: Bridge High Street on Saturday morning
TOP: The Army in Bishopsbourne; Sandbags in Barham; and police and the Army discuss the situation in Bishopsbourne

As heavy rainfall and strong winds lashed Canterbury, flooding continued to hit the surrounding villages hard.

The military was brought in on Saturday to help families and distribute sandbags to those worst affected.

The Environment Agency says river levels in the Nailbourne and Stour peaked over the weekend, but are now gradually dropping.

But the decline will continue at "a very slow rate" because the ground remains waterlogged, meaning low-lying villages could still suffer.

A flood warning remains in place for villages along the Nailbourne and Little Stour, including Barham, Bridge, Littlebourne, Patricbourne and Ickham.

The Nailbourne reached its highest levels so far this winter after Friday's heavy rain, peaking at 1.89m in School Lane, Bekesbourne.

Elsewhere, a flood warning



Capt Michael Rivington, of 5 Scots, was among a dozen soldiers in Bishopsbourne

for the Lower River Stour running through Fordwich, Sturry, Canterbury and Chartham was downgraded to a less serious flood alert on Monday.

But houses are still at risk in villages including Barham, Kingston, Bridge, Bekesbourne, Patricbourne, Wickhambreaux and Littlebourne.

Captain Michael Rivington,

from the 5 Scots regiment, was among the dozen soldiers helping to build flood defences in Bishopsbourne on Saturday.

He said: "We have a total of 100 soldiers from Howe Barracks working in the villages and on stand-by.

"The river bank here has broken and is threatening the houses nearby. We've already created a barrier and we're hoping to build channels to redistribute the water.

"We're just the hands that push the sandbags. We're providing reassurance to residents, and hopefully preventing more flooding before it can occur."

Canterbury City Council said the Army had been drafted in as a precautionary measure.

Spokesman Rob Davies said: "We are aware people may be concerned at seeing soldiers on the streets but we want to reassure residents that the weather forecast has improved and the danger of further flooding is manageable by the measures put in place and the resources available."

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'In very severe weather, we ask the Army to help. It was felt they could offer a bit of muscle'

Flooding in Bridge was particularly bad over the weekend, with water creeping up to homes lined with sandbags in Brewery Lane and the High Street.

Water was pumped from homes and a sandbag channel was built to take it across the High Street from Brewery Lane and into the Nailbourne.

Laurie Wakeham runs a butchers in the High Street. He managed to keep his shop open despite the 2ft of water outside by building a path of sandbags leading to the entrance.

He said: "We haven't seen it this bad since 2000. The water levels just shot up overnight on Friday.

"Luckily, the sandbags are doing their job so we can stay open."

Police presence was also increased in the most vulnerable villages.

Detective superintendent Martin Very said: "We've been working with a number of different agencies to respond to issues that have arisen because of the severe weather.

"Even when the rain stops, the groundwater runs off the fields.

"The worst affected areas are probably Bishopsbourne and Littlebourne, which we're monitoring closely.

"In very severe weather, we ask various agencies including the Army to help. It was felt they could offer a bit of muscle."

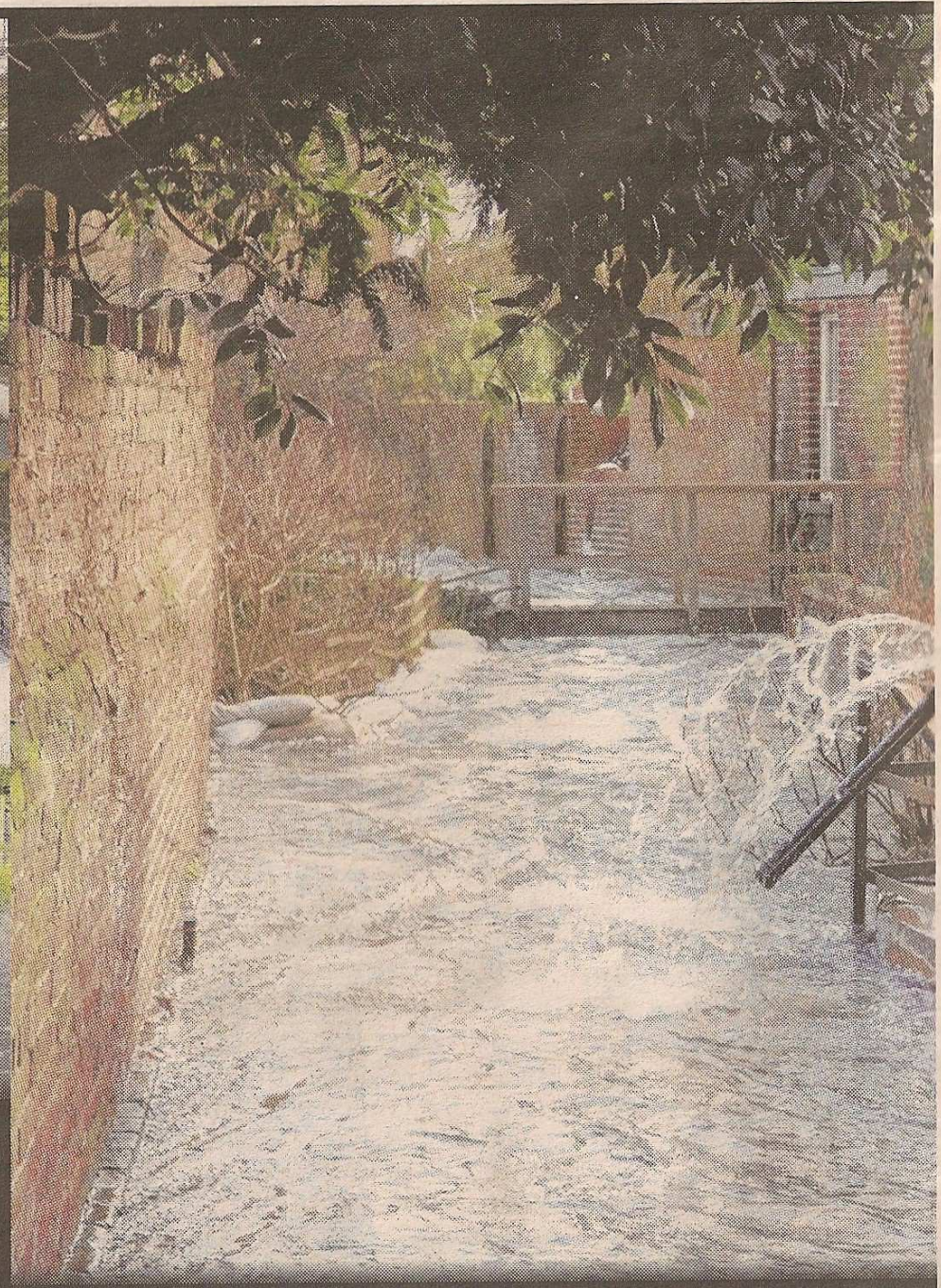
More showers are forecast for today (Thursday) but things should improve by Friday.



Butcher Laurie Wakeham managed to stay open

MORE STORM HAVOC PAGES 8-9

STORM HAVOC ACROSS THE DISTRICT



LEFT: Saint Mary the Virgin graveyard in Fordwich; Sainsbury's car park in Canterbury; A flooded road in Grove Ferry. **ABOVE:** Water rises through a manhole cover in Riverside; A car battles through the water near Petham; Sandbags and pumps in Patrixbourne. **RIGHT:** The swollen Nailbourne through Bridge

Driver's lucky escape as tree falls on crashed car

Gale force winds on Friday and Saturday blew down trees and caused road closures and chaos on the rails.

In Chartham, driver Robert Harden had a lucky escape when he crashed into an uprooted tree blocking Shalmsford Street in the early hours of Saturday morning.

As he was sitting in an off-duty police officer's car waiting for help, a second tree came crashing down onto his Volkswagen Golf, narrowly missing the car he was in.

Mr Harden explained: "A tree had fallen blocking the road. Due to the unlit road and heavy rain, I just didn't see it and went straight into it at around 50mph.

"I had to climb out the back of the car as the front doors wouldn't open. The car was a complete write-off.

"An off-duty police officer then found me, and let me sit in her car until the police came.

"Just as they arrived, a second

tree fell onto the back of my car and just clipped the bonnet of the off-duty police officer's car."

Police and fire crews were called to the freak accident at 1am, but luckily Mr Harden was unhurt. Then at 10.30am on Saturday, another tree fell in the same area and blocked the road.

In Bridge, the windscreen of a silver Mercedes was shattered by a roof tile that was dislodged by the wind in the High Street.

The London-bound stretch of the M2 was shut for several hours between junction 7 for Brenley Corner and junction 5 for Sittingbourne on Saturday after a series of trees fell onto the road.

The closure had a knock-on effect on other routes, with tailbacks stretching along the A2 from Canterbury and the A299 Thanet Way.

Southeastern also cancelled all its services before 10am on Saturday, with disruption continuing due to fallen trees on the railway line.



Cars ignoring road closures

Drivers have been warned to stay away from villages along the Nailbourne, where many flood-hit roads have been closed.

But chairman of the Nailbourne and Little Stour River Management Group Jill Thomas said people ignoring the advice are causing misery for locals.

She said: "Over the weekend many drivers chose to flout the road closed signs and drive through, causing much distress to the flooded residents and impeding the work of the agencies trying to resolve the flood issues.

"Driving along closed roads is a traffic offence and the police have stepped up patrols



Flooded road in Littlebourne

in the area. Residents are also recording and passing on the vehicle registration numbers of offenders."

KCC's deputy director of highways, David Hall, said: "Please observe the road closures and restrictions. They are there for a good reason.

"If you ignore them you are not only putting yourself at risk, but the safety of staff dealing with the problems and other local residents.

"You are also hampering the work done to bring water levels back to normal."



Robert Harden had a lucky escape when a tree fell on his car in Shalmsford Street, Chartham, on Saturday morning



A tree on the line near Canterbury West station



Residents join a council worker to help clear a fallen tree in Cockerling Road, Chartham



'No one has been charged for sandbags'

The city council has dished out a total of 16,000 sandbags to create defences and prevent homes from being flooded.

The authority is also advising residents living in vulnerable areas to keep their own supply of sandbags, which can be bought from Serco for up to £38.70 for a pack of 10.

Some have criticised the council for apparently charging for sandbags, particularly after Prime Minister David Cameron told them not to last week.

But spokesman Rob Davies said: "We've now used around 16,000 sandbags in the flood effort and they have all been given out free of charge.

"Nobody has been charged for a sandbag provided by the council, and this was the case even before the Prime Minister's comment.

"A number of outlets, such as Serco, DIY stores and builders' merchants, sell sandbags and this information is on our website for anyone who wishes to buy their own private supply now or in the future."



Seaton residents do their best to alleviate the flooding

Hamlet suffers as water diverted

Desperate villagers used buckets to move floodwater away from homes in Seaton near Ickham on Saturday.

Water being pumped from other areas rushed into the tiny hamlet at a speed of five tons a second, overwhelming residents trying to keep their houses dry.

The sudden influx of water came when the Environment

Agency opened a flood relief channel between Littlebourne and Seaton Mill.

The green fields behind Sue Van Devyver's house became completely sodden as the water ran through and into the Little Stour alongside her house.

She said: "We've never seen it flowing this high and fast before. It's not in the house luckily, but it is in my

neighbour's. The problem is, water is being fed from places like Ickham and Wickhambreaux and it's all ending up here."

Mrs Van Devyver said villagers were struggling to get help, adding: "We're not getting an answer from the council's emergency floodline and we've called the police's 101 number, but they've probably been inundated."



Sue Van Devyver by Seaton Mill as a swollen Little Stour cascades over a weir FM3040254



The waterlogged valley at the foot of Chartham Downs on Saturday FM3039899

The eccentric millionaire who inspired Chitty Chitty Bang Bang

AS THE CAR zoomed past, its engine making an almighty racket, the schoolboy stood transfixed. It was the early years of the 1920s and motor racing was a new and exciting sport.

Many years later, that little boy, now a man, would recall the colourful driver when he began to write a book about a very special car. That car's name was Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and the author was Ian Fleming. The driver he had seen at Brooklands, Surrey, was the very eccentric, and very wealthy playboy, Count Louis Zborowski.

Now, some newly discovered footage dating from around 1924 shows the young Count in two 30-minute films that have echoes of early Hollywood with chases, a kidnap, a railway line and general high jinx.

The unique films of Zborowski emerged after Tim Jones, senior lecturer in media, art and design at Canterbury Christ Church University, appealed for footage of the local area and received work by the filmmaker Sydney Bligh's family.

Starring Zborowski's wife, Violet, a girlfriend Pixie, his two dogs and engineer Clive Gallop, the film is particularly precious as it provides the only image of the famous Higham Park estate railway line, a mile-long narrow gauge steam which Zborowski had built around his estate near Canterbury, Kent, for the sheer hell of it.

The story of the count, his madcap life and tragic death aged 29 will be

Newly found film footage reveals Count Louis Zborowski, the inspiration behind Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, at play. JANE CLINTON hears about his wild life and early death

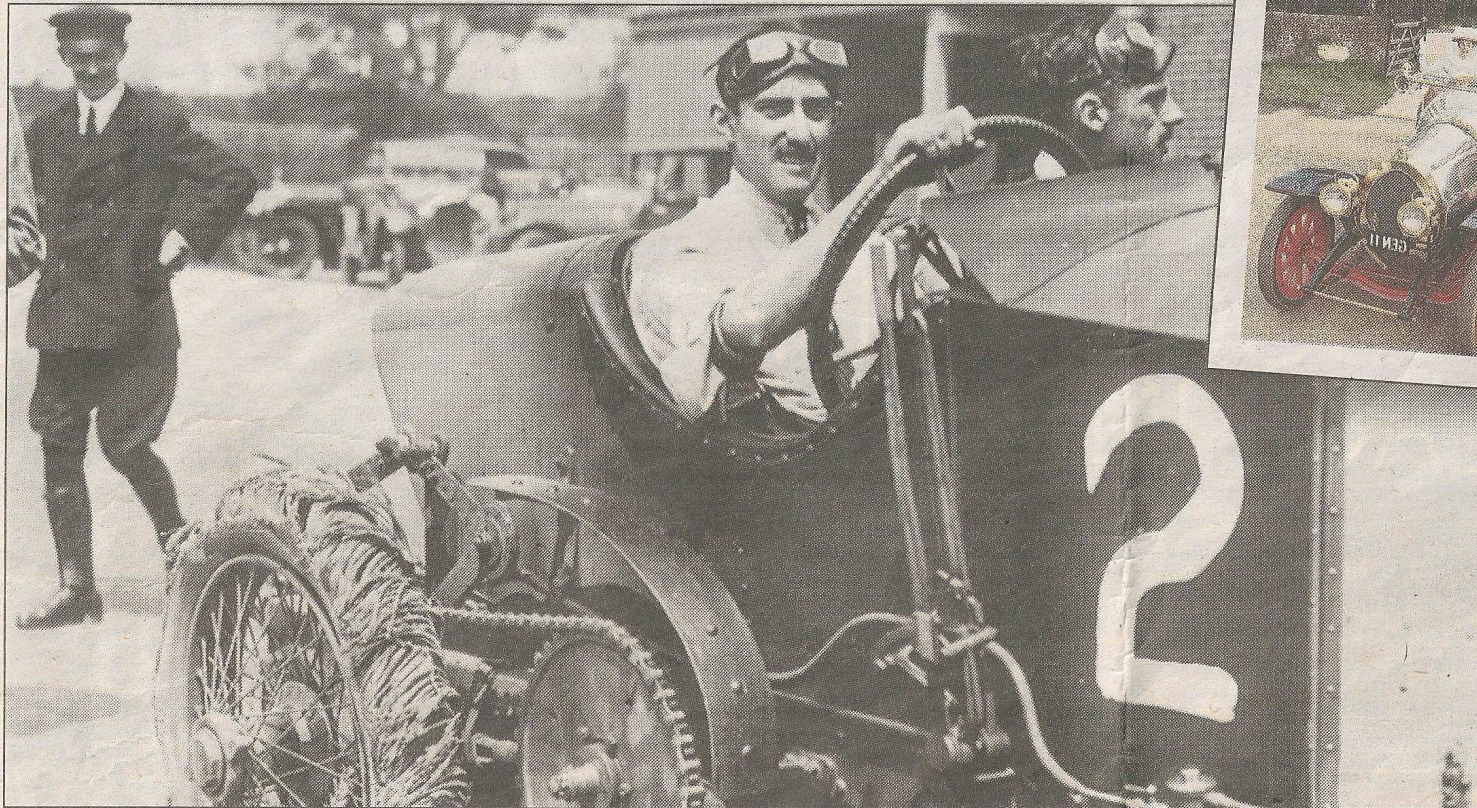
in the spotlight and re-establish him as the motor racing pioneer that he most certainly was.

"You had to be mad or extremely brave to drive those cars, which were designed by rule of thumb, at such speed," says David Paine who researched the family for 40 years for his book, *The Zborowski Inheritance*.

"He was a bit of a playboy and married a chorus girl called Violet and they lived at Higham Park. He had no notion of the value of money and would spend it like it was going out of fashion. The film shows him with his slicked-back black hair, a moustache and with a cigarette. It is basically them having fun on his estate."

According to Tim Jones, the films are very "sophisticated" and a "spine-tingling" find.

Zborowski was born in 1895. The son of the racing driver William Eliot Morris Zborowski and Margaret, a wealthy American heiress. She was the granddaughter of William Backhouse Astor Sr and Margaret



DAREDEVIL: Zborowski at the end of a race. Note his shredded rear tyre. Inset, the 1968 movie version of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang

Pictures: KOBAL; MIKE GUNNILL

Rebecca Armstrong, part of the famous Astor family. When Louis was eight in 1903, his father died in a car racing crash in Nice, France. Margaret bought the Higham Park Estate which included a farm, 225 acres and 12 houses for Louis. She spent vast amounts of money on it before dying of cancer in 1911 when Louis was 16. Overnight he became one of the richest under-21s in the world, inheriting not just Higham

Park but property in the United States as well. The count was obsessed with motor racing, both driving cars and building them (he even built a fire engine for the locals and became captain of the fire brigade).

He was somewhat wild. He would blow up statuary on the estate, some of which crashed through the roof of his neighbour, and he had houses built only to blow them up for the entertainment of his guests. He

began racing with the help of his engineer, Captain Clive Gallop, and amassed an impressive fleet of English cars. Two of them were known as Chitty Bang Bang and Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. Names which would prove more than enough inspiration for Fleming.

According to Paine, who interviewed Clive Gallop, the names were not a nod to the noise they could make (although with aeroplane

engines in them, one car would have sounded like six Harley-Davidsons) but to "recreational" activities.

"During the First World War when soldiers left the front they were given a chit and they could either go to Brussels or France or come to England for a bang," he said of the rather coarse perk. "Naming the cars after this was a joke, really."

Zborowski's dream was to drive for Mercedes. In 1924 he got his wish

and entered the Italian Grand Prix at Monza. Sadly on the 44th lap he lost control of his car and was killed. His widow went on to marry the sewing machine millionaire Paris Singer and eventually the Higham Park estate railway was dismantled.

As well as his childhood Brooklands memory, Fleming encountered a restored car from Zborowski's fleet when he was driving near Sandwich in Kent.

He waved down the driver, Peter Harris Mayes, for a chat and it is said that after Mayes revealed the history of the car Fleming found the inspiration for Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, which he wrote when he was recovering from a heart attack aged 52. It was published in October 1964, two months after his death, and went on to be adapted into the 1968 film.

There is a line in the novel when the character Commander Pott says to his children: "Never say 'no' to adventures. Always say 'yes', otherwise you'll lead a very dull life."

Those words could almost certainly have served as the motto by which Count Zborowski lived his life.

● *Two special screenings of the discovered films and Tim Jones's documentary, Seeking Sydney about the filmmaker Sydney Bligh, will take place on October 25 and November 1 at 2pm in the Powell Lecture Theatre at Canterbury Christ Church University's North Holmes Campus. To buy £5 tickets or to discuss donating any pre-war footage from the Kent area call 01227 782955 or visit canterbury.ac.uk/shop/archive-film-screenings*



Christ Church lecturer Tim Jones has uncovered this rare film footage showing Chitty Bang Bang inventor Count Zborowski, left, with Clive Gallop and aboard a train on the mile-long tracks built around his Higham Park estate in Bridge

Chitty Bang Bang inventor built a mile-long track around his country estate at Bridge

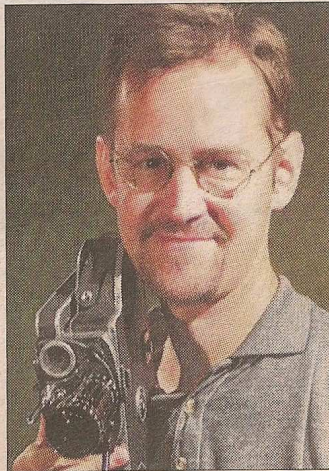
Rare film of eccentric count's railway

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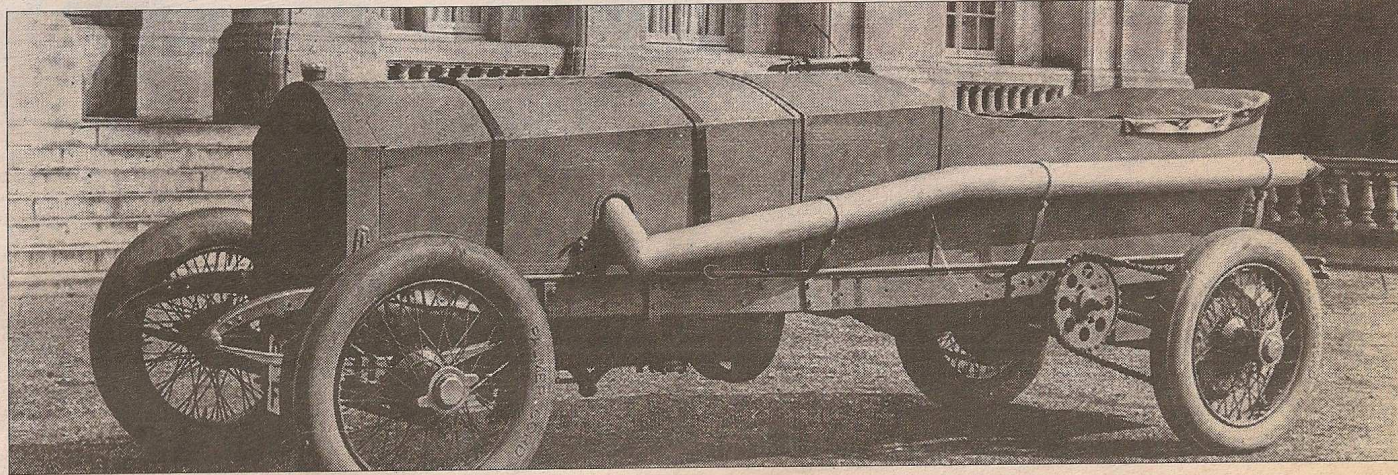
Rare footage of an eccentric millionaire who provided the inspiration for Chitty Chitty Bang Bang has been unearthed.

The amateur film features playboy Count Louis Zborowski, who lived in Bridge and built cars that influenced the magical flying vehicle made famous in Ian Fleming's children's book.

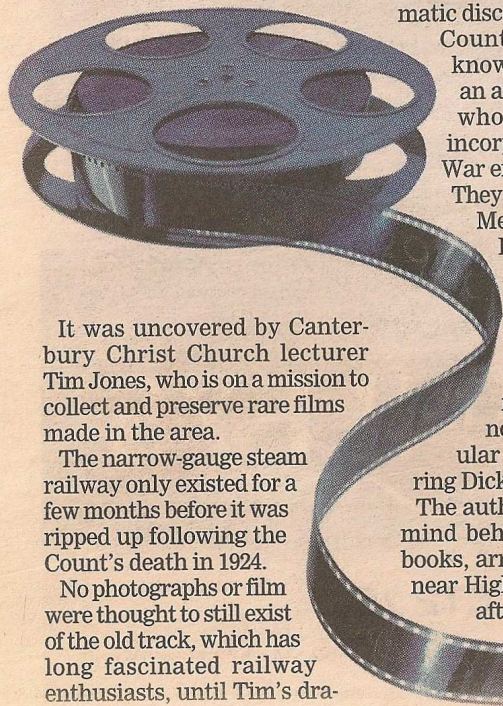
The old Hollywood-style flick also includes the only known images of a mile-long railway track built around his Higham Park estate.



Lecturer Tim Jones



Chitty Bang Bang outside Higham House, Bridge



It was uncovered by Canterbury Christ Church lecturer Tim Jones, who is on a mission to collect and preserve rare films made in the area.

The narrow-gauge steam railway only existed for a few months before it was ripped up following the Count's death in 1924.

No photographs or film were thought to still exist of the old track, which has long fascinated railway enthusiasts, until Tim's dra-

matic discovery.

Count Zborowski is best known for his exploits as an amateur racing driver, who built his own cars incorporating First World War engines.

They included a customised Mercedes called Chitty Bang Bang, which was made at the Count's workshop in St Radigund's Street.

It inspired the "fine four-fendered friend" featured in Fleming's novel and later the popular film adaptation starring Dick Van Dyke.

The author, who was also the mind behind the James Bond books, arrived in Bekesbourne near Higham Park a few years after the Count's death.

Tim, who lectures

in media, art and design, said: "When I viewed these films for the first time I had a shiver down my spine, especially when I saw shots of the railway track.

"It soon became apparent that this home-made drama had been shot at the Higham Estate in 1924 and starred Count Zborowski."

The Count was killed aged 29 while driving for Mercedes in the Italian Grand Prix, just a few months after the film was produced.

To mark the 90th anniversary of his death, Tim is inviting the public to view the 30-minute film at screenings in the university's Powell lecture theatre at 2pm on Saturday, October 25, and Saturday, November 1.

Tickets are £5 and must be booked in advance online at www.canterbury.ac.uk/shop/archive-film-screenings or by calling Julia Bennett on 01227 782955.



A blue plaque marks the workshop where Count Zborowski built two Chitty Bang Bang cars in St Radigund's Street, Canterbury

'I had a shiver down my spine especially when I saw shots of the railway track'



A scene from the film Chitty Chitty Bang Bang

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