

Children like their new school

"Kentish Gazette" reporter
A new £80,000 school has been given the seal of approval by those hardened education critics—the pupils.

The first children to use Bridge and Patricksbourne Church of England Controlled Primary School recently moved into the new buildings in Cuyningham Lane, Bridge. After having time to settle in children seem delighted with their new surroundings, and the teachers who worked in the old buildings are pleased with the change of scene.

The new school caters for children from Bridge, Patricksbourne, Bekebourne and Bishopbourne. There are 218

children using seven classrooms, one of which is a mobile building in the playground. The classrooms in the new building are luxurious compared to those most of the teachers and pupils have been accustomed to. There are fitted carpets and gone are the rows of desks. Instead, there are small, differently shaped tables that can be arranged to suit the room and the teacher.

Another innovation is a white blackboard. Teachers now have a gleaming white surface on the walls on which to write in crayons or felt pens. However, if closely questioned some still think the old blackboard was the best as the pens and crayons often slip on the new surface.

The school also now has a hall which can be turned into a gymnasium. Such instant conversions were never possible at the former 100-year-old Bridge Primary School.

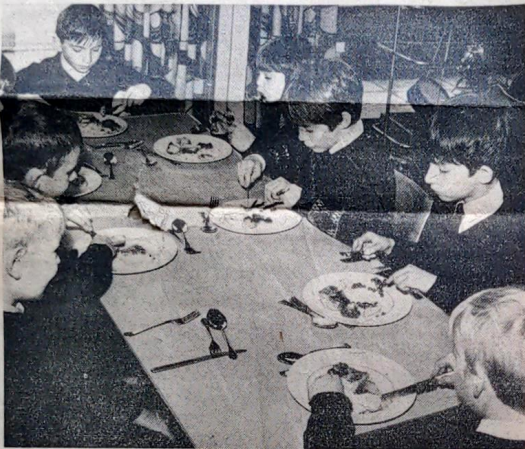
A gleaming, well equipped kitchen makes sure that the children's stomachs are well filled, while a library ensures that their minds are well fed with literature.

Mrs Olive Knight, who has been headmistress at Bridge Primary School since 1948, has now moved into the head teacher's room at the new school. She is more than pleased with the new buildings: "They are spacious and attractive in every way."

One class I visited on Monday endorsed Mrs. Knight's views. When asked to provide their teacher with a new item, the reply came: "It is fun to work in our new school." There's a recommendation for you!



Everything in this particular garden is lovely. The gardener is five-year-old Yvonne Files, who is showing her watercress crop to her teacher, Mrs. Joan Tarrats.



Forget about those school meals' jokes; these children at Bridge do not seem to have any complaints.



A head teacher at work, Mrs. Olive Knight, who has been at Bridge since 1948.



Counting out the dinner money in her new office is the school secretary, Mrs. Dorothy Shirley.



Time for serious studies, with Mrs. Majorie Collier giving instructions from her new white "blackboard."



All mod cons in the school's kitchen, where a meal is being prepared by, left to right: Mrs. Barbara Gilliday, Mrs. Margaret Gilbert and Mrs. Pauline Surridge.



Children using the school gymnasium find themselves having a swinging time on the modern apparatus.



Five-year-old Toni Denne is quite the young lady with her gown-up handbag, which she takes to school.

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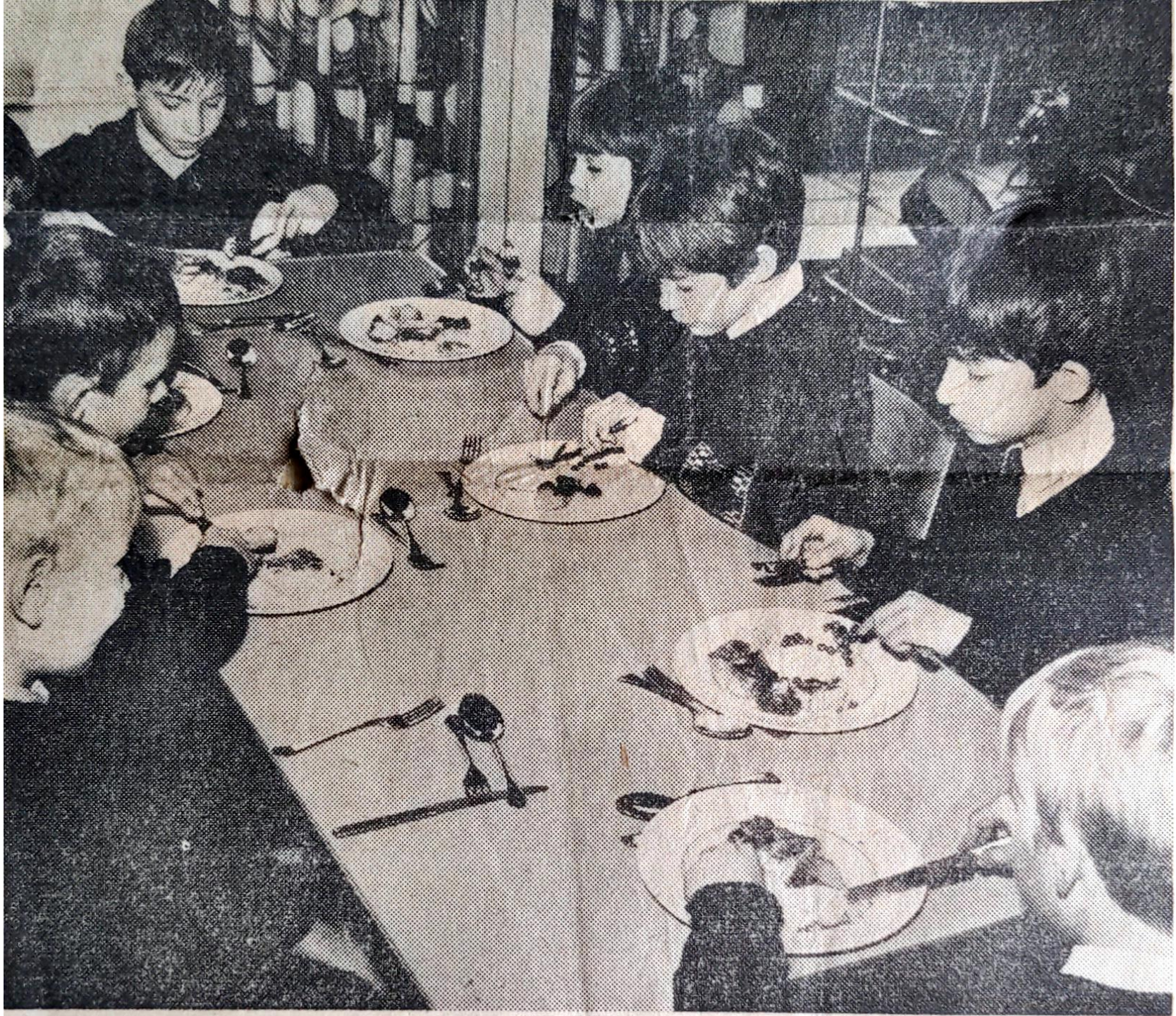


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Our stately home

Patricia Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans pooled all their resources to buy dilapidated stately home Higham Park. Five years on, they're still battling to restore it – and manning the tearooms on open days. JANE FURNIVAL meets them at home in Kent



Patricia Gibb thought she'd found the perfect free entertainment for a wet Sunday afternoon. One March day in 1994, she took her son Barry and her old friend Amanda Harris-Deans to nose around Higham Park, an 87-room mansion just outside Canterbury that was for sale. No one would be crazy enough to buy this house, they giggled, picking their way through the barbed wire around the crumbling balustrades outside. What a relief that they wouldn't be the ones paying out thousands of pounds to restore peeling paint, cracked plasterwork, a rotten roof and 25 acres of overgrown gardens. Then they went off to tea in Patricia's warm, modern bungalow nearby. Amicably separated from their husbands, their children grown up, Patricia, then 54, and Amanda, then 44, enjoyed comfortable, leisured lives, breeding ponies and playing bridge.

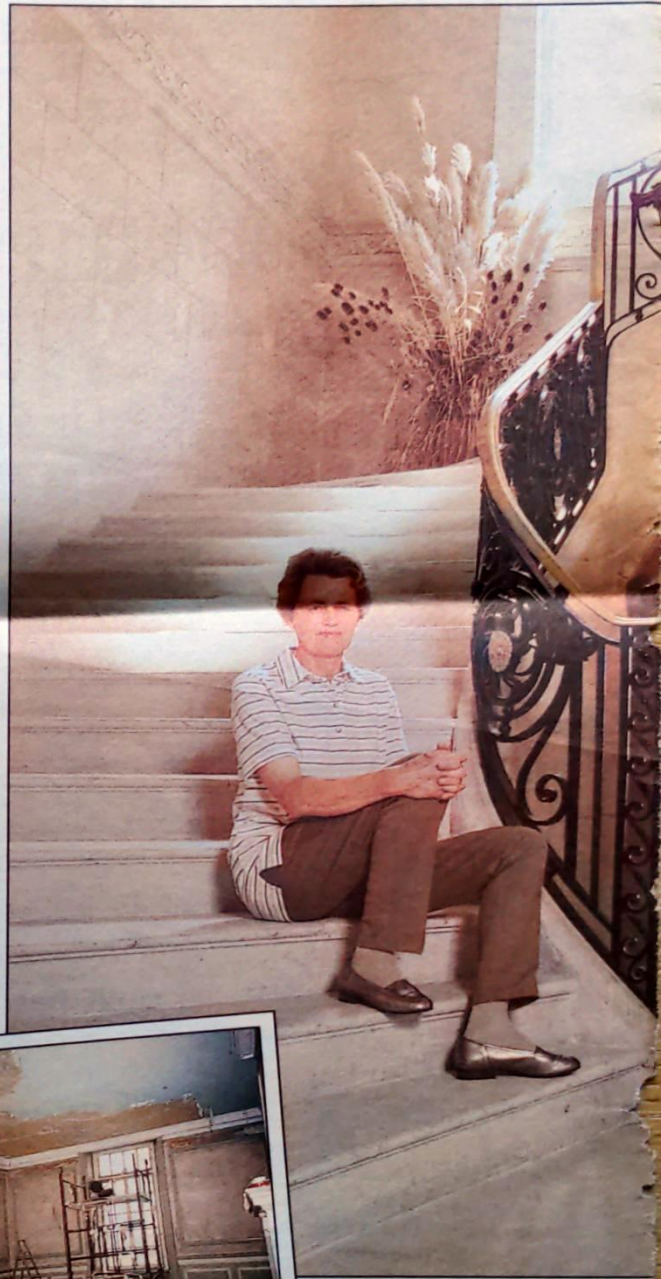
But that Sunday, perhaps there was a mysterious, life-changing ingredient in the tea. They found themselves making an offer to buy Higham Park, having worked out they could do it if both women sold their houses. Patricia's son Barry, 30, who works for the French bank Parabar in London, threw his savings into the pot too. 'We bid a million pounds: so ridiculously low the estate agent didn't bother to send an acknowledgement,' laughs Patricia. Instead, Higham was sold to a property developer who had sweet-talked £2 million out of a bank to convert it into a swish 200-bedroom hotel. After that, whenever Patricia and Amanda drove past the estate, they peered up the drive to see what the builders were doing. But they saw no sign of work. Eventually, they asked the estate agent what had happened. It seems that on the eve of completing the sale, Higham's buyer had disappeared abroad with the bank's money. The house was back on the market, in the hands of the Official Receiver.

Over the next few months, prospective buyers (including, it was rumoured, Richard Branson)

surfaced, then pulled out, as there was so much restoration work involved. But Patricia, Amanda and Barry hung on with the same 'paltry' £1 million offer. Their grit impressed the Official Receiver so much that he supported them. Now, the friends are proud chateaines of one of Britain's most offbeat great houses.

The two self-confessed amateurs, who knew more about horses than houses, have restored and decorated it on modest incomes with little professional help. These ladies, who barely knew how to plant a rose from Woolworths, have raised acres of formal gardens from the dead, embellishing them with rare plants in complex colour patterns. The massive roof still has dry rot. Until it is repaired, they can't begin work on the upper floor with its maze of bedrooms and rusting bathtubs. But, when it comes at last, a grant from Canterbury Council will help them. It's the least the Council can do for Higham Park, which holds visitors in thrall with its gardens and glittering history that includes Julius Caesar, Mozart, Jane Austen, General de Gaulle, and even the fabulous car Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

For the ladies, the present is rather less glamorous than the past. 'We don't have much time to socialise,' confesses Patricia, in the brisk no-nonsense tones of a woman used to telling a horse to mind its manners at a tricky fence. 'Every day, we get up at 5.30am and work in the garden till 11am when we change, ready to do public tours. I man the gate or the tearooms. We hardly speak during the day.' The house is closed on Fridays and Saturdays so they can mow and weed all day with the aid of Barry, who



Room with a view: Just one of the 87 rooms needing renovation — Amanda and Patricia have yet to start upstairs

comes to help each weekend. The story of these doughty ladies' adventures would make a good British film comedy. 'Instead of a nice little bottle of Chanel for our birthdays, we had scaffolding towers,' says Amanda. These were a big improvement on the ladders they had to balance on while using toothpicks to scrape out the old paint clogging the fine plaster mouldings in the ceilings. 'Six weeks cleaning one square. The pain!'

Last Christmas morning saw them balancing precariously on the roof, replacing tiles blown off the night before. With experts such as landscape gardeners

Dream house is awakening with tender loving care

ONE of the area's most prestigious houses is being restored under an ambitious programme calling for cash, commitment and lots of tender, loving care.

Higham Park, better known for many years as Highland Court, Bridge, dates from the late 1300s. It has seen many changes of style, architecture and owners since then.

Say the words Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and everyone recalls the house and its 24 acres of gardens and grounds at the top of Bridge Hill.

You don't have to be a racing enthusiast to recall the car which lent its name to the novel and film. It was built here by Count Zborowski who raced for Mercedes and took part in speed trials along Herne Bay seafront.

A SEVEN-YEAR dream of owning a 14th century mansion is now reality for a mother, her son and a friend.

But the house — at one time a hospital — stood empty for years and the 24 acres of grounds resembled a wilderness.

Undaunted, they took on the mammoth task of restoring everything to its former glory.

ROSEMARY BRAITHWAITE went along to meet them.

But the count and his millionaire cronies are only a few of the ghosts lingering in the high-ceilinged, sunny rooms or in the beautiful grounds.

It is in their memory that mother and son team Pat and Barry Gibb with their friend, Amanda Harris-Deans, are uncovering secret gardens once hidden under tangled undergrowth, letting light into yew-lined walks and water gardens and putting their efforts into back-breaking projects like restoring the balustrades surrounding the Palladian frontage.

If that were all, the trio would be smiling if not laughing.

But they also face repairs costing £250,000 to the mansion's roof and a £500,000 restoration programme to turn the main house into apartments quite apart from finding the near £800,000 asking price.

It is a real labour of love. When they saw the house for the first time in 1988, it was owned by the area health authority and used as a hospital annex.

They fell in love with its



HOPES FLOWERING: Amanda Harris-Deans and Pat Gibb at Higham Park

grandeur, its marble entrance hall, Adam moulding and fireplaces and romantic ballroom and dreamed of owning it. In 1995, the dream became a reality and they are still on cloud nine.

Pat said: "We had to pawn our souls to buy it. It had been empty for years, the plaster mouldings were dropping away, the roof needed repairing, in fact, if it had been left another year, there would be no house to restore."

"But we fell in love with it. Barry was determined to buy it, he sold his house and that was it. Luckily we are not afraid of hard work and we love gardening."

Amanda, who with Pat had restored Court Lees Manor, Whitstable, is already looking past the labouring to the days when the gardens play host to parties as they have done throughout their history.

It is a project which would make lesser souls think

longingly of a seaside bunaglow.

Think slash and hack rather than gently garden and you get the picture of their first few months in the garden. They had been in residence for months before they realised they owned a secret garden where the Edwardian gentry escaped from the ears of their servants.

Now visitors can stroll violet-strewn paths through banks of daffodils, admire magnolias and rare species of maples and look forward to the blooming of the first hundred or so roses to be planted in the sunken rose garden.

Pat said: "We have had help from so many people, including Diana Gilbert, the Whitstable garden designer, who advised us about the ancient paths and the history of the plants and our friends John and Betty Worthing, who live in the grounds."

"But there are so many

questions to be answered. We are hoping someone will tell us who designed the garden which is a landscape park in the Repton style. And any information about the house, which has gone through so many changes, would be fascinating."

They know Higham was the original home of the Hythe and Dymchurch Railway, built by Bligh Brothers at the suggestion of Prince Yusupov, who escaped to England after the assassination of Rasputin.

They know Higham was renamed Highland after Walter Whigham bought it and didn't like the sound of Whigham from Higham but they would love to know more.

The gardens and new tea-room are open to the public on Wednesdays and Sundays noon-6pm. The proceeds will go towards the garden restoration.

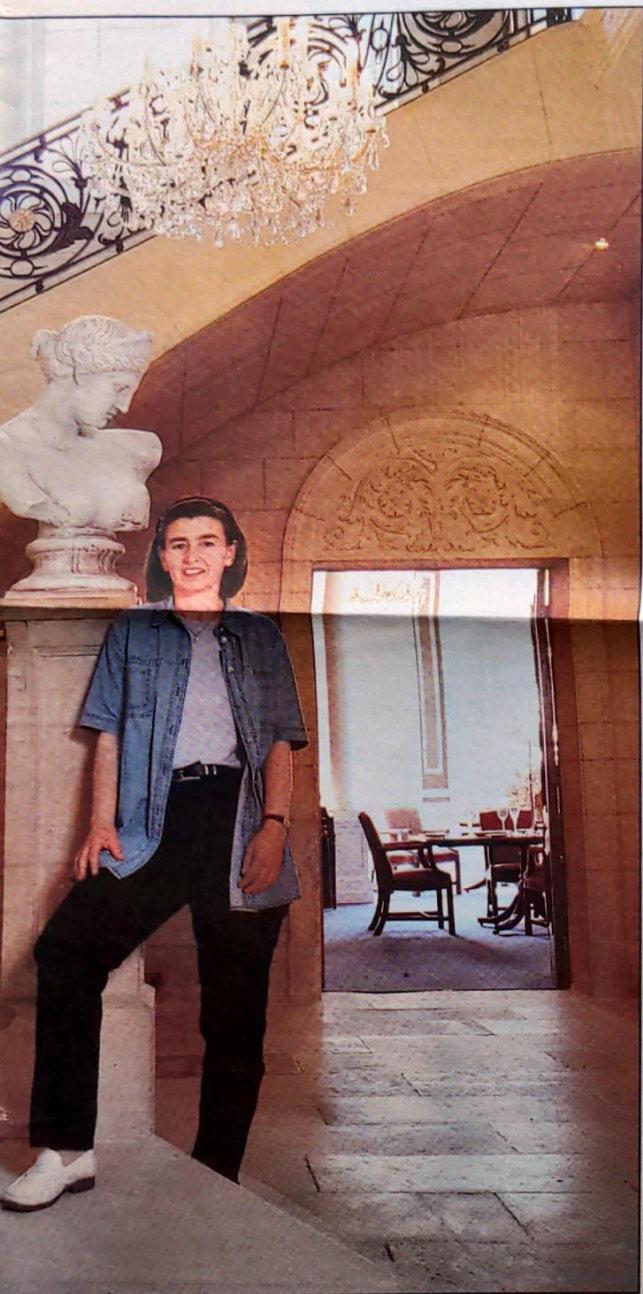


FINE VIEW: Pat Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans by the Venetian water garden



RESTORATION PIECE: Barry Gibb and his mother, Pat, work on a balustrade

on a shoestring



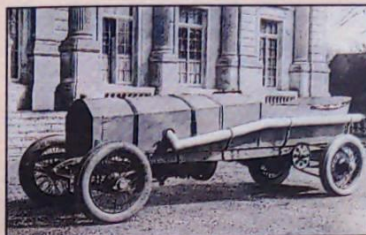
charging beyond their means, they mucked in to learn every skill themselves — except plumbing, which needed an expert to deal with the four-inch iron pipes, and wiring, which needed a professional to lay the 400 metres needed in the hall alone. They visited other old houses for tips, wheedling free help where possible. A gardening teacher gave advice in exchange for a cartload of horse manure. A stonemason told them how to grind off the cement laid over the Portland stone floor in the hall. Patricia, an asthmatic, lost her voice for a fortnight after that filthy activity. Amanda persuaded a reluctant joiner, who let slip that his hobby was old

To the manor drawn: Since buying Higham Park for the knockdown price of £1 million, restoring it to its former grandeur has become an all-consuming labour of love for Patricia, above left, and Amanda

Higham's history: From Caesar to Chitty Chitty Bang Bang

● **LOCAL TRADITION** tells how Julius Caesar once camped on land now in Higham's grounds, finding it a convenient day's march from Dover. In 1320, Edward II gave a house on the site to the De Higham family, descendants of Norman invaders who helped William the Conqueror subdue the area. Present owners Amanda and Patricia have found Tudor brickwork in the basement and a priest's hole from a time when residents included the Culpeper family of famous herbalists, one of whom, Thomas, was later fatally implicated in Mary Queen of Scots' final conspiracy against Elizabeth I. The house passed through many hands, until in 1901, a banker called William Gay added a portico and gardens inspired by his grandson's glowing account of his Grand Tour of Europe.

● **HIGHAM PARK'S** modern heyday began in 1910, when Countess Margaret Zborowska, granddaughter of Waldorf Astor, fell in love with the house. Widowed in 1903, when her husband died in a racing accident, she was determined to buy Higham as an English estate for her son, Louis. William Gay was reluctant to sell — until Margaret, who owned much of Manhattan, made an offer he couldn't refuse. Just as the Countess moved in, in 1911, she died of flu, leaving Louis, her 16-year-old son, to live there alone with his £11.5 million pound legacy. Louis, a real-life Great Gatsby, married a Gaiety Girl called Violet Leicester, one of an elite group of stunning music-hall dancers who wed into the upper classes. He raced miniature trains round the garden, and built fast cars. A neighbour, James Bond creator Ian Fleming, watched



'Ian Fleming watched agog as Louis created three racing cars with aeroplane engines and called them Chitty Chitty Bang Bang 1, 2 and 3'

agog as Louis created three extraordinary racing cars with aeroplane engines — Chitty Chitty Bang Bang 1, II and III. Later, Fleming wrote a fairy tale about a flying car of the same name, made into a film in the Sixties.

● **FLAMBOYANT AND GENEROUS**, Count Louis presented the villagers of Bridge with the fastest fire engine of its day. But his fascination with speed brought him misery. 'A neighbour remembers him burying a Mercedes in a chalkpit here,' says Patricia. Apparently, Count Louis had had the car built for his best friend, John Hartsthorne-Cooper. 'John was killed in speed trials driving it, and the Count decided to bury the car and never to speak of him again.' Count Louis was killed in 1924, racing a Mercedes just like his father. Violet married into another wealthy family and Higham was sold to Walter Whigham. 'He changed the name to Highland Court because he didn't want to be known as "Whigham of Hig-ham",' explains Amanda. Higham was home to Walter's most famous relative, Margaret Duchess of Argyll, notorious for the divorce case brought by her husband after he discovered a photo of her, wearing only her pearls, with a 'headless man' said to be the actor Douglas Fairbanks Junior.

● **IN 1939 THE HOUSE** was used by the Army as a barracks, and in 1942 it became Free French headquarter for General de Gaulle. After the War, it was sold and became a hospital, then a children's home. In 1988, its tumbledown state led to closure and it was boarded up. Finally came rescue and a new lease of life with Amanda and Patricia.

motorbikes that he could reproduce in his garage the tiny metal hinges on each window in Higham's facade, which had been hanging off after storm damage.

'We do everything by gut feeling,' says Patricia. 'We planned the flower beds in shades of apricot and it was right, to judge by a picture from the 1900s brought to us one day by a former butler here.' ICI was particularly helpful, designing — free — a special sealant to stop the paint bubbling on the plaster. Furniture came by luck when Barry's bank moved to modern offices and didn't want antiquated items such as a 28-foot table.

The idea of opening the house for formal tours occurred by accident when an old man came around and asked if he could see the garden. 'Loads of people kept arriving to look round,' says Amanda. This is their first year of offering what they call proper tours, in which one of them relates the triumphs and problems of living at Higham. Though they love their visitors, they also have unnerving ones. Amanda, Patricia and Barry have all heard eerie footsteps in one overhead room. Around the kitchen, an invisible man has whistled a tune — which the ladies both heard — and former staff and patients coming back to visit (in one of its previous incarnations, the house had been a hospital), have recounted tales of hearing invisible ambulances driving up the gravel drive to the front door, then drawing away a few minutes later.

Other terrifying visits have come from all-too-solid

men clutching iron bars, hoping to raid the house for imaginary treasures. One, when cornered, ran his van into Amanda in his haste to escape, but she wasn't badly hurt. They now have floodlights, and the police arrive within two minutes of an alarm call. Amanda took a snapshot of one intruder, a man in black they saw coming across a field. They ran after him — only to find he had vanished into thin air. The developed film showed nothing but a cloudy haze in the field, with the outline of someone in its midst. A scientist found nothing wrong with the film, nor did any image appear on the photograph frames either side of the cloud. They concluded that the man was yet another ghost.

Five years after moving in, they can make plans for the future. When the upper floors are fixed, they want to put in eight apartments, rented out to like-minded people, who can help to pay for the house's upkeep. They will restore garden follies, such as a temple they have seen in old photos, and reinstate the pretty peacock-shaped topiary, whose outlines they uncovered. Then, perhaps, a little light horse-breeding once again. And — who knows? — one day, they might have time to change into evening frocks for drinks on the terrace like ladies to the manor born.

Higham Park, near Bridge, Canterbury, Kent, is open 11am-6pm, Sunday to Thursday, until October 31. House, £1.50; gardens, £2.50 (children £1). Tel: 01227 830830, or visit www.higham-park.co.uk

Progress report on the enormous task taken on by a trio bidding to bring back to its former glory a house with a fascinating history



TASTEFUL WORK: The splendour of the dining room at Higham Park 18/2301E



GARDEN GLORY: Pat Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans in the extensive grounds 10/2298E



GRACEFUL LIVING: One of the private sitting rooms at the mansion 27/2301E

Restoring their home – of 87 rooms!

LAST year we highlighted the start of work to restore the former Highland Court hospital, the grey-stoned mansion above Bridge. A year on, Kent Journalist of the **ASSOCIATE WARD** checks on the survival of owners and house alike. Pictures: MIKE WATERMAN



ABOVE: The bustle of a ward when the ballroom of Highland Court Hospital. BELOW: The ballroom now restored to former glory. 28/2301E 27/2301E



PAT Gibb is what is delicately referred to as a woman of a certain age. Her son Barry is a respectable stock broker in the City. Their friend Amanda Harris-Deans is no blushing teenager either. Which makes it all the stranger that they appear stuck in that particular condition of twenty-somethings – living out of plastic bags while they do up their home.

One of the joys of moving towards middle-age is that you have usually finally settled into a home in which you expect to remain for a considerable time. After leaving school comes a rented flat, the stresses of being a first-time buyer, then several more moves, to follow the work, or to accommodate a growing family.

With each move comes an urge to re-do the new home. The DIY firms make handsome profits, and the family lives in a building site for a couple of years as rooms and gardens are transformed.

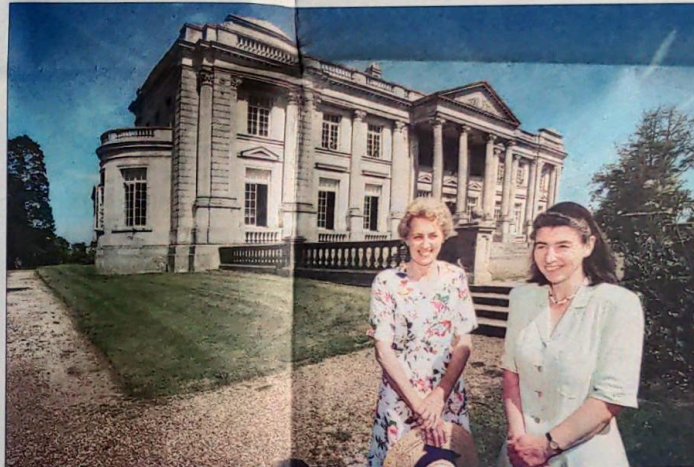
As an acquaintance of mine told me, moving into a dream six-bedroom house by a river was wonderful, but it was a case of living in splendid poverty.

"The house is wonderful, but so far we can only afford to draw pictures of what we want on the kitchen walls."

The Gibb mother-and-son partnership, plus Amanda, bought the old Highland Court Hospital in 1995, and last year opened its gardens to the public as they began to restore it to its pre-hospital glory days.

This is the grey pile above Bridge where Count Zborowski garaged the racing cars that were to be immortalised in Ian Fleming's unlikely children's classic *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

Originally given to the de Hefham family by Edward II (thus its now restored name Higham), it belonged in the 1500s to the herbalist Thomas Culpeper.



SECOND PROJECT: Pat Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans have already restored one former mansion 5/2298E

Its name was changed when it was acquired by the Whigham family, which found the epithet Whigham of Higham a little too ungainly.

During the Second World War it was used by the Army, which left it in the mess it left most of its requisitioned property. Later it became a hospital, and then stood derelict for 12 years.

No one, least of all they themselves, can explain quite why its present triumvirate of owners took it on.

Between them they had already restored a smaller mansion at Court Lees Manor, Whitstable. After it was sold Pat vowed: "That's the last old house that I will ever own."

They built a new home at Brossingham that rejigged in all the mod cons and lack of rear bills of any new building. But then Highland Court came on the market and Pat decided to have a snoop – just a look for curiosity's sake – that's all, honest.

"We only came here to have a nose around, but then Barry asked me to make a booking to come and look, and fell in love with it."

"We had no intention of buying it, but he sold his house, Amanda sold hers and I sold mine."

The house and 24 acres of grounds cost them close on £800,000, the roof will take another £100,000 – the paper work to achieve a grant is still grinding on –

and other refurbishment is projected to cost another £500,000.

"There are 87 rooms here and we can't leave them empty or they will deteriorate," says Amanda.

"I took three months to prepare and paint the ballroom, and that does not include the plastering."

Like the ballroom, the dining room has been taken back to the 1850s, using picture gallery red.

you have to be as original as possible. Then we had to buy oil paintings to cover it up," says Pat.

The hospital fire doors, cut without any consideration through the walls and moulding, have been made into secret doors.

Fittings from the first floor have been cannibalised to make the ground floor as original as possible.

"Some things cannot be done because we do not have enough of a specialist staff. The banister rail on the staircase in the hall, for example, has been painted gold rather than returned to burnished steel that you have to keep on burnishing," says Amanda.

They have still not properly unpacked; there is always something else to do, such as install new central heating.

"The heating all ran off one set of pipes with no valve.

"If you had a problem you had to drain the whole house, and that took four days."

For people who like to get everything right, there is a surprising lack of documented evidence on the landscaped gardens that they have uncovered outside.

There is a large Italian sunken water garden surrounded by a rose hedge. Hidden in the yew they have discovered the topiary wire frames that once formed the basis for peacocks, balls, crowns and cones.

They stumbled across a secret garden so thickly overgrown with self-seeded trees they never knew it existed.

Even the terraced rose garden has had to be revealed by excavation techniques more akin to archaeology than gardening.

"We opened the gardens because we were getting so many people coming for a look. But then we found it was the people coming who could tell us what used to be here."

"We are still appealing for any help from anyone who remembers what it once looked like," says Pat.

The entrance money also helps towards the maintenance of the gardens. "We planted 4,000 new plants last year – and you wouldn't notice them really."

The gardens and tea shop are open Wednesdays and Sundays from April to September, noon to 6pm, last admissions 4.30pm, £2.50 adults, 50p children.

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Family ticket - 2 adults, 2 children. Children under 5 - free		
Children between 5 - 15 charged at child rates		
Thursday July 16	Adult tickets @ discount rate of £7.50	£
	Child tickets @ discount rate of £4.00	
	OAP tickets @ discount rate of £4.00	
	Family tickets @ discount rate of £21.00	
Friday July 17	Adult tickets @ discount rate of £7.00	£
	Child tickets @ discount rate of £3.50	
	OAP tickets @ discount rate of £4.00	
	Family tickets @ discount rate of £18.00	
Saturday July 18	Adult tickets @ discount rate of £7.00	£
	Child tickets @ discount rate of £3.50	
	OAP tickets @ discount rate of £4.00	
	Family tickets @ discount rate of £18.00	
	Total no. of tickets	Amount

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Students sample stately living

Cultural bridge first built by WWII PoW



WELCOME: Amanda Harris-Deans greets the group at Higham Park

VILLAGERS have been bridging the gap between two cultures by welcoming visitors from Japan into their homes.

The East meets West initiative is the brainchild of University of Kent at Canterbury comparative cultural studies lecturer Valerie de Furrentes and former Japanese prisoner of war William Rose.

Both residents of Bridge, Valerie and William organised for children from Tenryu Junior High School to spend a week in their village learning about England and its traditions.

The connection with Tenryu was established by William, who was incarcerated on the site where the school now stands during the Second World War.

After returning to England, William wrote a book about his experiences which is now a central part of the social-studies curriculum for the Tenryu students.

The eight-day visit was packed with activities and events, including a visit to a Canterbury Cathedral service attended by the Japanese ambassador, a morning spent in a local school and a visit to stately home Higham Park. Higham Park owner Amanda

Harris-Deans welcomed the group on Tuesday afternoon and gave them a tour of her home.

She said: "The students live in a little village up a mountain in Japan, so I don't think they have ever seen a house quite like this - they were thoroughly amazed."

"They had all heard of James Bond 007, and so were very impressed when we explained the Ian Fleming connection to them [the Bond author lived at the park] and also when they learned that Mozart and Jane Austen had visited here."

"They liked the Italian water garden, which is very different to what they are used to, and we also showed them our bamboo and koi carp, which they recognised straight away."

"Although their English was very basic, the group were all smiles; I'm sure the group enjoyed their visit and, of course, they took hundreds of photos!"

The students will stay with their hosts until Sunday, when they will return home to tell their families about their experiences.

"All the host families say the students have been wonderful guests and have enjoyed introducing them to life in England," said Valerie.



BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: Students from Tenryu with (from left) translator Trevor Anderson, William Rose, Valerie de Furrentes and Bridge councillor John Anderson



EXCHANGE: Amanda Harris-Deans chats to the visitors

WEE SKIPS



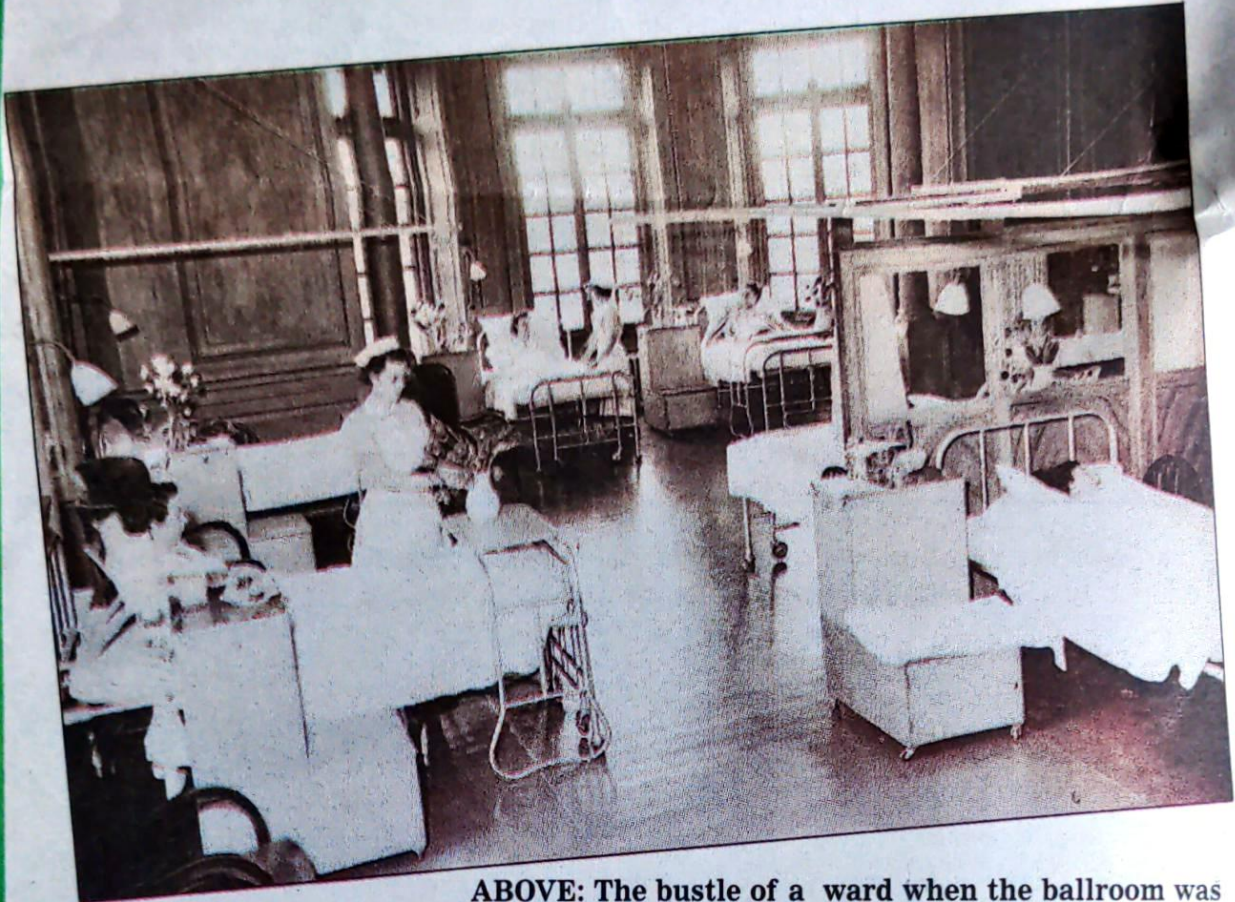
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Restoring



ABOVE: The bustle of a ward when the ballroom was part of Highland Court Hospital. **BELOW:** The ballroom now restored to former glory. 28/2301E 272301E





SECOND PROJECT: Pat Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans have already restored one former mansion

5/2298E

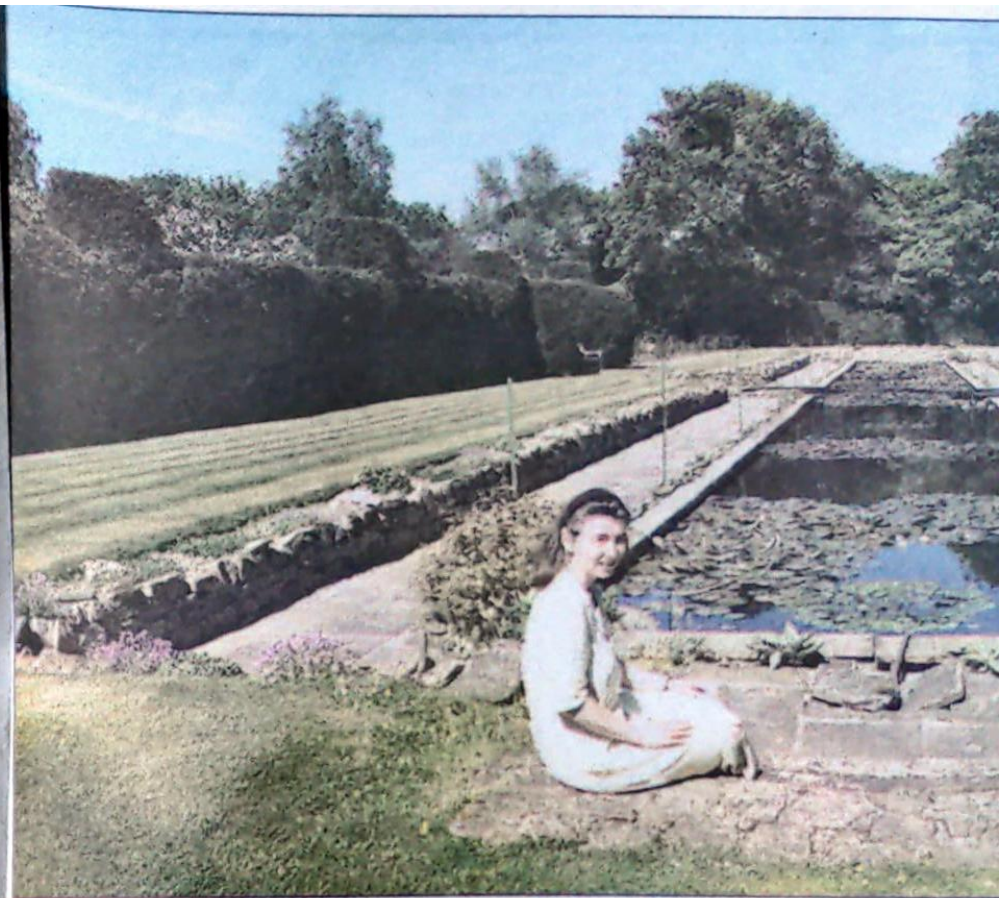
Its name was changed when it was

They built a new home at Bessingham

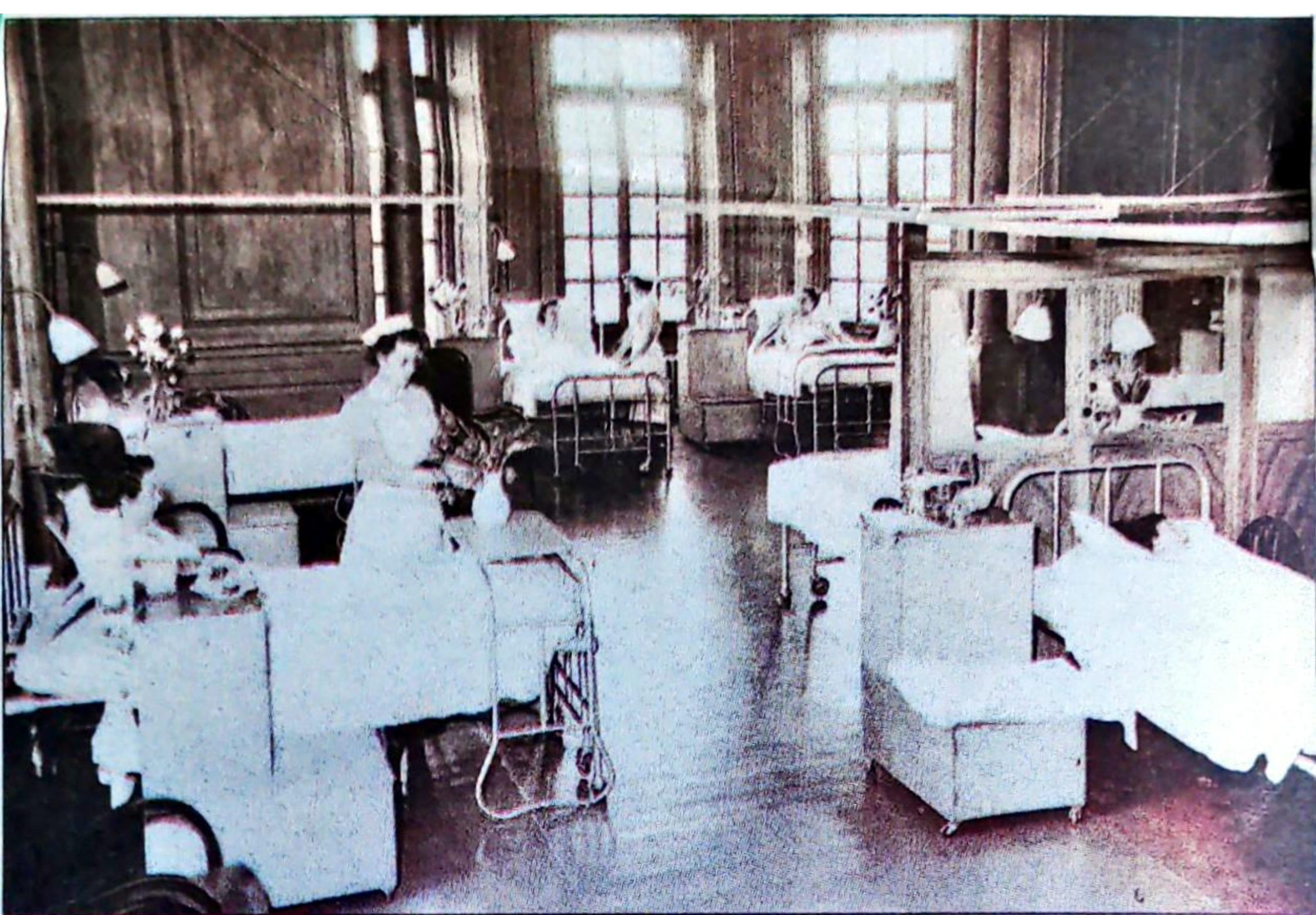
and other refurbishment is projected to



TASTEFUL WORK: The splendour of the dining room at Higham Park 18/2301E



GARDEN GLORY: Pat Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans in the extensive g



TASTEFUL WORK: The splendour of the dining room at Higham Park 18/2301E

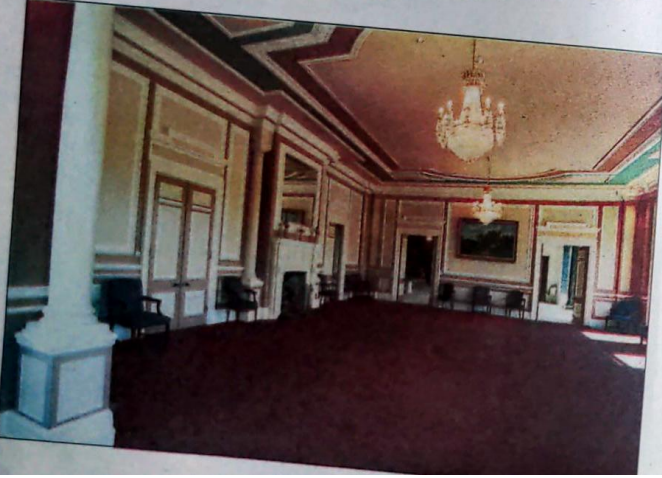
GARDEN GLORY: Pat Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans in the extensive grounds 10/2298E

GRACEFUL LIVING: One of the private sitting rooms at the mansion 27/2301E

Restoring their home – of 87 rooms!



ABOVE: The bustle of a ward when the ballroom was part of Highland Court Hospital. BELOW: The ballroom now restored to former glory. 28/2301E 27/2301E



LAST year we highlighted the start of work to restore the former Highland Court hospital, the grey-stoned mansion above Bridge. A year on, Kent Journalist of the **GEORGE WARD** checks on the survival of owners and house alike. Pictures: MIKE WATERMAN

PAT Gibb is what is delicately referred to as a woman of a certain age. Her son Barry is a respectable stock broker in the City. Their friend Amanda Harris-Deans is no blushing teenager either. Which makes it all the stranger that they appear stuck in that particular condition of twenty-somethings — living out of plastic bags while they do up their home.

One of the joys of moving towards middle-age is that you have usually finally settled into a home in which you expect to remain for a considerable time. After leaving school comes a rented flat, the stresses of being a first-time buyer, then several more moves, to follow the work, or to accommodate a growing family.

With each move comes an urge to re-do the new home. The DIY firms make handsome profits, and the family lives in a building site for a couple of years as rooms and gardens are transformed.

As an acquaintance of mine told me, moving into a dream six-bedroom house by a river was wonderful, but it was a case of living in splendid poverty.

"The house is wonderful, but so far we can only afford to draw pictures of what we want on the kitchen walls."

The Gibb mother-and-son partnership, plus Amanda, bought the old Highland Court Hospital in 1995, and last year opened its gardens to the public as they began to restore it to its pre-hospital glory days.

This is the grey pile above Bridge where Count Zborowski garaged the racing cars that were to be immortalised in Ian Fleming's unlikely children's classic *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

Originally given to the de Hefham family by Edward II (thus its now restored name Higham), it belonged in the 1500s to the herbalist Thomas Culpeper.



SECOND PROJECT: Pat Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans have already restored one former mansion 5/2298E

Its name was changed when it was acquired by the Whigham family, which found the epithet Whigham of Higham a little too ungainly.

During the Second World War it was used by the Army, which left it in the mess it left most of its requisitioned property. Later it became a hospital, and then stood derelict for 12 years.

No one, least of all they themselves, can explain quite why its present triumvirate of owners took it on.

Between them they had already restored a smaller mansion at Court Lees Manor, Whitstable. After it was sold Pat vowed: "That's the last old house that I will ever own."

They built a new home at Bossingham that rejoiced in all the mod cons and lack of repair bills of any new building.

But then Highland Court came on the market and Pat decided to have a snoo — just a look for curiosity's sake — that's all, honest.

"We only came here to have a nose around, but then Barry asked me to make a booking to come and look, and fell in love with it.

"We had no intention of buying it, but he sold his house, Amanda sold hers and I sold mine."

The house and 24 acres of grounds cost them close on £800,000, the roof will take another £300,000 — the paper work to achieve a grant is still grinding on —

and other refurbishment is projected to cost another £500,000.

They have already restored much of the ground floor where they will all live.

The plan is now to spend the summer working on the garden, then, when the grant is through, repair the roof and convert the first floor into apartments.

"There are 87 rooms here and we can't leave them empty or they will deteriorate," says Amanda.

It took three months to prepare and paint the ballroom, and that does not include the plastering.

Like the ballroom, the dining room has been taken back to the 1850s, using picture gallery red.

"To be honest it is not our colour, but

you have to be as original as possible. Then we had to buy oil paintings to cover it up," says Pat.

The hospital fire doors, cut without any consideration through the walls and moulding, have been made into secret doors.

Fittings from the first floor have been cannibalised to make the ground floor as original as possible.

"Some things cannot be done because we do not have enough domestic staff. The banister rail on the staircase in the hall, for example, has been painted gold rather than returned to burnished steel that you have to keep on burnishing," says Amanda.

They have still not properly unpacked; there is always something else to do, such as install new central heating.

"The heating all ran off one set of pipes with no valve.

"If you had a problem you had to drain the whole house, and that took four days."

For people who like to get everything right, there is a surprising lack of documented evidence on the landscaped gardens that they have uncovered outside.

There is a large Italian sunken water garden surrounded by a low hedge. Hidden in the yew they have discovered the topiary wire frames that once formed the basis for peacocks, balls, crowns and cones.

They stumbled across a secret garden so thickly overgrown with self-seeded trees they never knew it existed.

Even the terraced rose garden has had to be revealed by excavation techniques more akin to archaeology than gardening.

"We opened the gardens because we were getting so many people coming for a look. But then we found it was the people coming who could tell us what used to be here.

"We are still appealing for any help from anyone who remembers what it once looked like," says Pat.

The entrance money also helps towards the maintenance of the garden. "We planted 4,000 new plants last year — and you wouldn't notice them really."

The gardens and tea shop are open Wednesdays and Sundays from April to September, noon to 6pm. Last admissions 4.30pm, £2.50 adults, 50p children.



GRACEFUL LIVING: One of the private sitting rooms at the mansion 27/2301E

their home - of 87 rooms

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SECOND PROJECT: Pat Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans have already restored one former mansion 5/2298E

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HIGHAM PARK: £4m price tag of mansion with connections to Fleming and Henry VIII

Ladies of manor put grand home on sale

THE owners of Higham Park at Bridge spent 10 years painstakingly restoring the historic mansion to a home of magnificent splendour.

So why now, when they have finished creating their dream home, have they decided to put it up for sale?

Gerry Warren visits the finest country home on sale in the county - and checks his Lotto numbers.

AMANDA Harris-Dean and Patricia Gibb remember all too well their first visit to Higham Park at Bridge.

"We just were being a bit nosy and wanted a peek round but the caretaker told us to clear off," said Amanda.

But the dilapidated, empty mansion house caught their imagination and together with Patricia's son, Barry, they sold their respective homes, pooled their resources and bought the Grade II listed property for £1 million.

Patricia said: "Some people thought we were a bit crazy but we just fell in love with the place."

A decade later, and with the house and magnificent gardens transformed by their extensive and sympathetic restoration, it is back on the market for £4 million.

But their labour of love has not been a get-rich-quick property scheme and they are selling up with heavy hearts.

"We don't want to leave the place but it is just getting a bit too much for us now," said Pat.

"It's not really the house itself because we can cope with that.

But, at 65, I'm not getting any younger and keeping the gardens open to the public, which we need to do to provide an income, is very demanding."

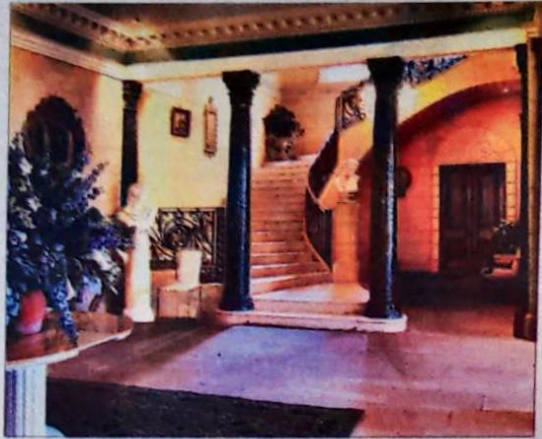
Amanda added: "We have been very lucky to have had the help of some very fine craftsmen and so many friends have helped along the way, simply because they loved the place.

"None of us was experienced in property restoration so it has been something of a journey of discovery. But we have also found out some fascinating history about the place and met many people who have had associations with the house.

"What we have created is a home, not a museum, and I would love it to go to someone who wants to keep it as a family home and enjoy like we have."

Whoever buys Higham Park, which is set in 25 acres and includes a separate coach house and garden cottage, will also be acquiring a piece of history because the grand house has some illustrious connections.

In the 16th century it was the home of Thomas Culpepper who had an affair with Catherine Howard, wife of Henry VIII, who



■ The entrance hall and staircase at Higham Park

ordered his execution.

But it is perhaps most famous as the birthplace of Count Zborowski's racing cars, immortalised by Ian Fleming's Chitty Bang Bang.

In the 1950s, it was a hospital but was closed by the health authority in the early 1990s. A property developer bought it with plans to develop a 200 bed hotel but they never got off the ground, and Amanda, Pat and Barry acquired the house by tender.

Amanda added: "When the day comes to hand over the keys I have no doubt it will be very hard for us because we have put our heart and soul into the place. But we are proud of what we have achieved."

■ Higham Park Gardens are now closed to visitors. The sale is being handled by Strutt & Parker on 01227 451123.

■ Just two miles away another country mansion is up for sale, Bridge Place, for £2 million.



■ Amanda Harris-Dean and Patricia Gibb have reluctantly put Higham Park on the market

Picture: Gerry Warren p0896392

ONE IN A MILLION



Higham Park

HIGHAM PARK is an exceptional and historic Grade II-listed Palladian-style mansion in the village of Bridge, near Canterbury.

This magnificent house, which is currently being used as a private residence, offers some 24,000 sq ft of space.

In addition to the main residence there is two-bedroom garden cottage, three-bedroom coach house, a period stable block and grooms' quarters, and two-bedroom No Name Cottage.

The magnificent formal gardens feature a rose garden and a series of secret gardens, an Italianate water garden, woodland and paddocks. In total, the gardens and grounds amount to 22.91 acres.

The superb grounds provide a suitably grand setting for the mansion house, including a long driveway which terminates in the gravelled forecourt, the walls and urns of which are Grade II-listed in their own right.

To either side of the forecourt are wide lawns bounded on the eastern side by high walls, which in turn lead to the walled gardens and wide herbaceous beds, and on the western side by mature shrubs and trees.

On the western flank a pathway



leads round to the main area of formal gardens.

Immediately next to the house is the sunken rose garden, which has been lovingly been recreated from a derelict state and is now a superb focal point on the western elevation.

The rose garden is set below low retaining stone walls with steps leading down on the western, southern and northern sides.

A central rectangular lily pond is surrounded by paved pathways and there are four L-shaped beds on each of the corners.

The mansion is just three miles from Canterbury and 14 miles from Ashford's international station.

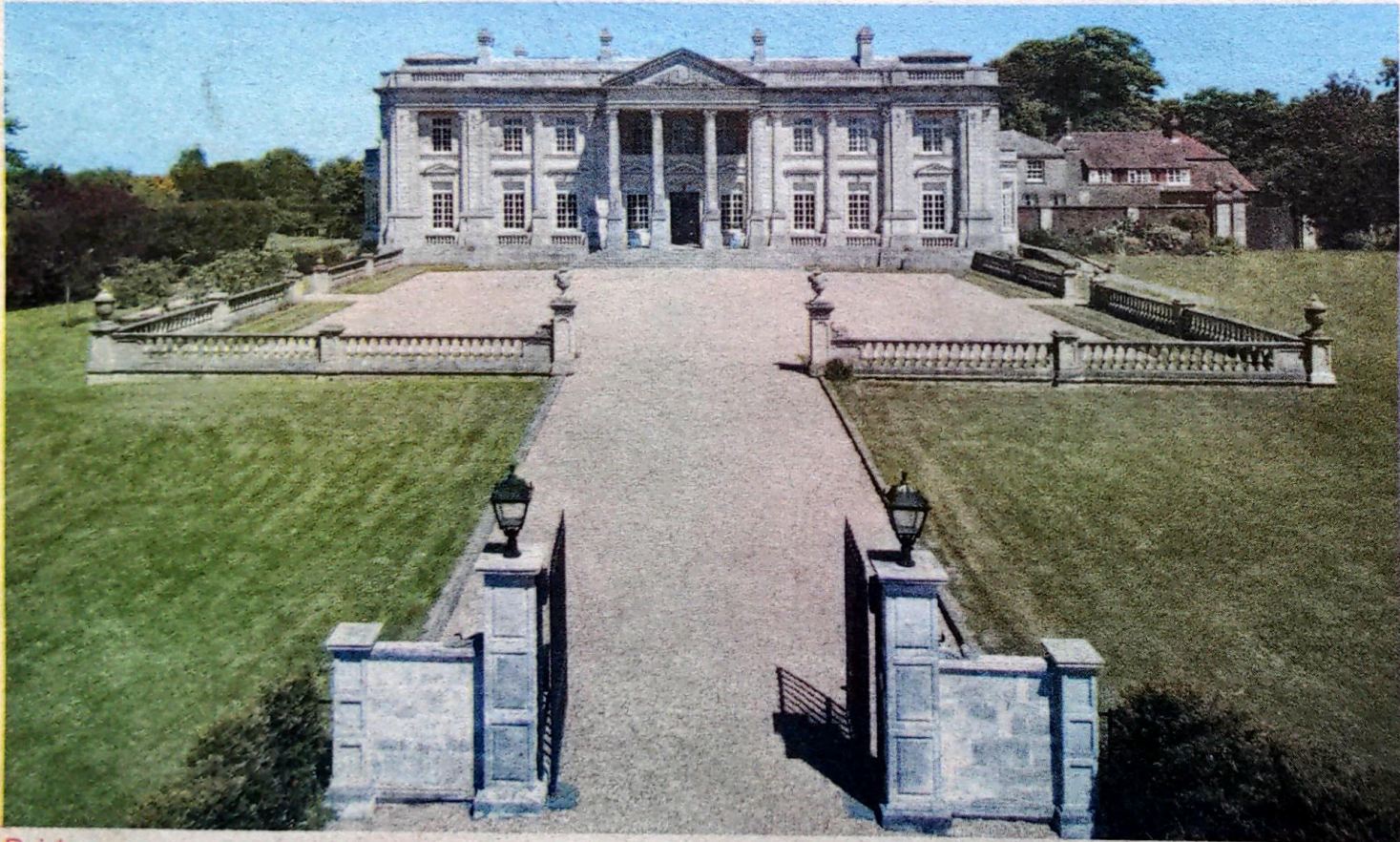
Higham Park is available with a guide price of £4 million through Strutt & Parker, who can be contacted on 01227 451123.



Oct 9th 2005

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STRUTT & PARKER 



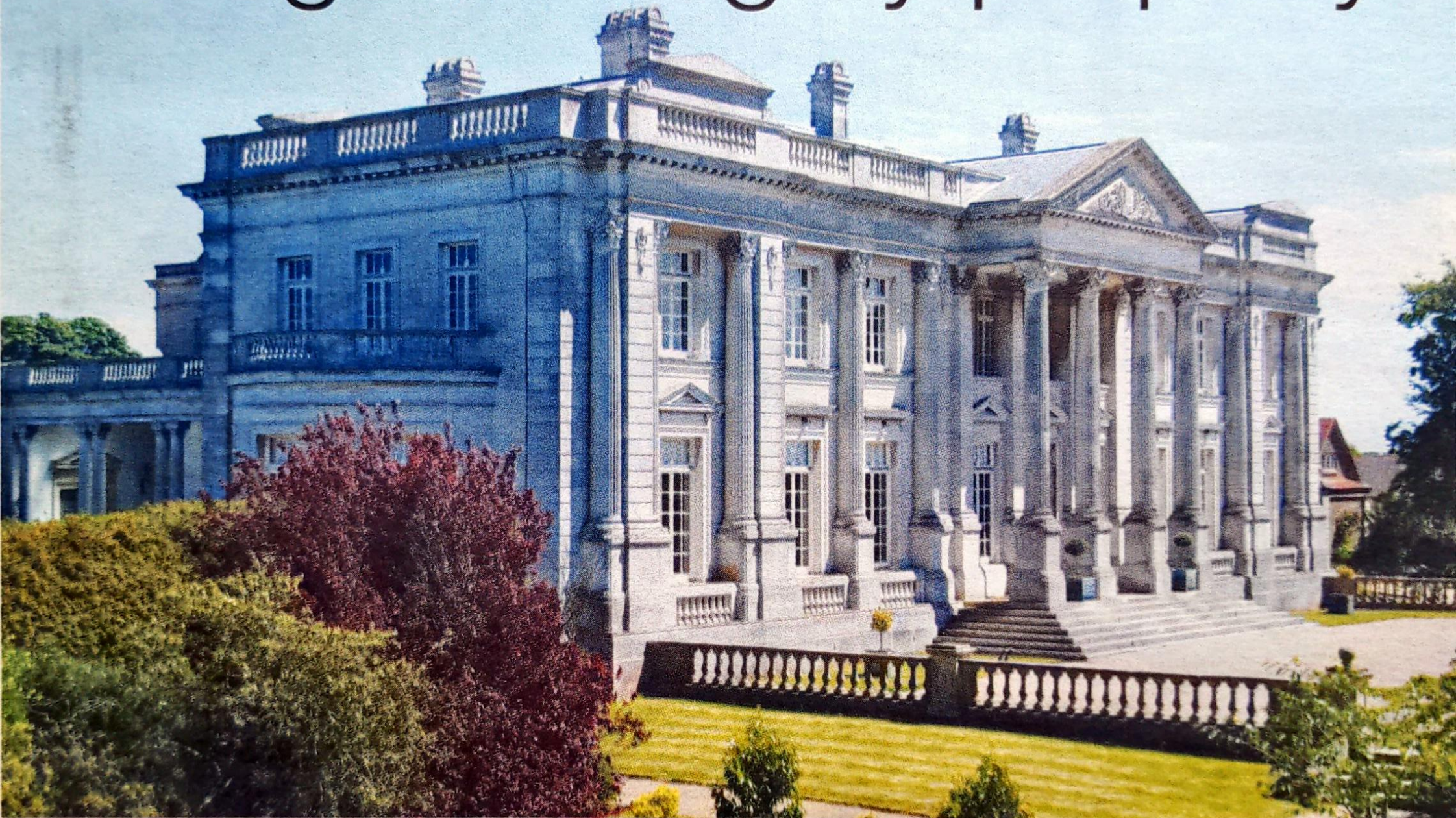
Bridge

Canterbury 3 miles, Ashford International Station 14 miles

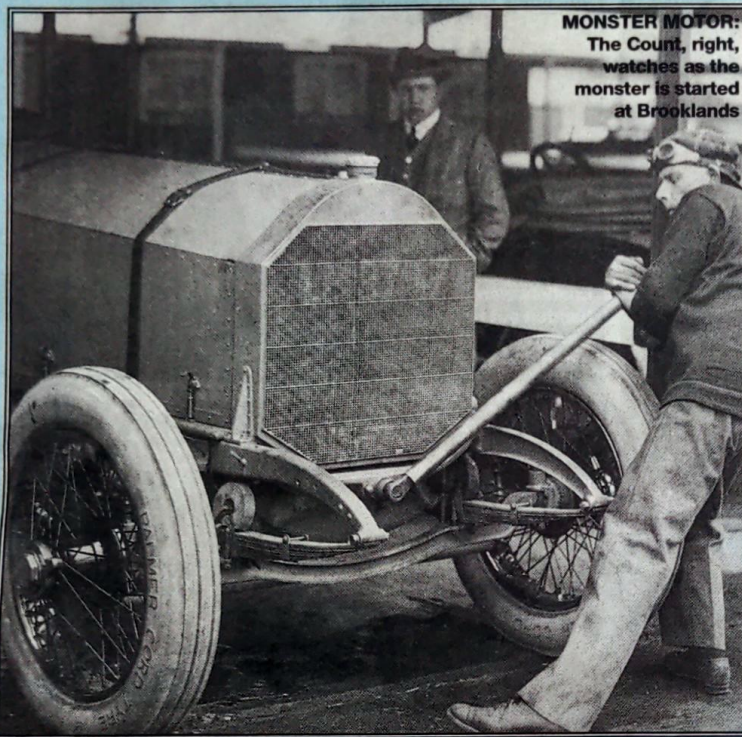
An exceptional and historic Grade II* listed Palladian style mansion. Recently restored and providing opportunities for residential and a number of other alternative uses. Higham Park (24,000 sq ft) is currently used as a private residence. Garden Cottage (2 bedrooms). Coach House (3 bedrooms). Period stable block and grooms' quarters. 'No Name' Cottage (2 bedrooms). Garaging. Magnificent formal gardens with a rose garden and a series of secret gardens, Italianate water garden, woodland, paddocks. Walled garden with planning consent for six residences.

In all: about 25 acres. Region of £4,000,000

A Higham mighty property



Cars licensed to thrill



MONSTER MOTOR:
The Count, right,
watches as the
monster is started
at Brooklands



DASHING DRIVER: Count Zborowski in the cockpit of one of his races

THE MAD COUNT INSPIRED BOND CREATOR FLEMING

WHEN spymaster Ian Fleming decided to write a story for his young son he drew upon his own childhood, when he used to watch a mad nobleman driving a monster motorcar.

The result was Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, which became a film and now a top musical but not many people know the tale behind the success story.

When he was a boy in the 1920s Ian Fleming used to be a regular visitor to Higham Park, Bridge, home of Count Louis Zborowski, a famous racing driver.

The multi-millionaire Count owned four Mercedes cars powered by Zeppelin engines and locals used to say they could be heard three miles away when they took to the road.

Parking close to them could be hazardous because flames from the exhaust could strip paint from anything close at hand.

The cars were so fearsome the burghers of Canterbury banned the Count from driving them through the narrow streets of the city. They feared buildings would fall down because of the vibration coming from the Mercedes.

Co-owner of Higham Park Amanda Harris-Deans said: "Young Ian Fleming

Story by IAN READ

used to watch agog as Louis created these extraordinary racing cars with aeroplane engines."

The dashing Count was killed in 1924 when he crashed his Mercedes during a race. After his death one of the monster cars was dumped on a farm at Ringwould near Deal.

It was subsequently restored and sold in America.

The James Bond writer used to visit relatives at Higham Park after the Count's death and it is thought the secret agent was partly based on the Count, who inherited £11 million when his mother died.

Count Zborowski blew the lot on a stable of 93 racing cars and some equally fast women — again in the Bond image.

Ian Fleming lived in the Archbishop's Palace at Bekesbourne, and died in Kent and Canterbury Hospital.

Anybody wanting to learn about how the Count lived can pop down to Higham Park, where Amanda and Pat Gibb have been restoring the rundown Georgian house to its former glory.

The author would recognise the house, which has also been used as a hospital, because the interior has been restored together with the gardens which are open from Sundays to Thursdays.

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CO-OWNER: Amanda with original Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and programme for the musical

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LABOUR OF LOVE AT STATELY HOME



FINE FRONTAGE: Higham Park, at Bridge, presents an imposing face to the world
Ref: pd 55303

Park gardens unearthed

From previous page

birch, yew and old oaks underplanted with spring flowers but still there are acres yet to be brought under control.

Their season begins on Easter Sunday, opening 11am-5pm, Sunday-Thursday until October. The income from visitors helps to support their work.

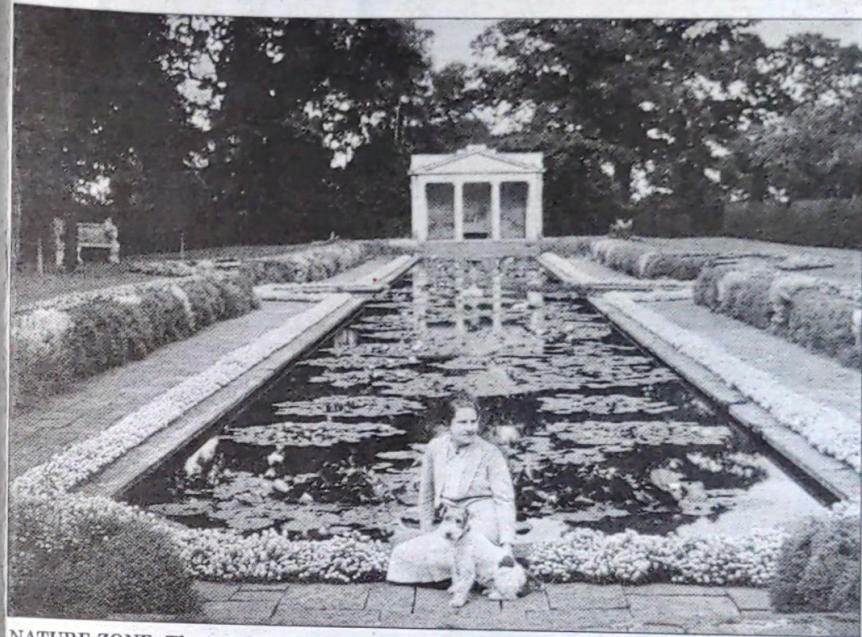
They also provide tours of the house, but only the restored parts.

"I don't think we realised just how lovely it was all going to be," said Amanda

well on the way to restoring it to the wonderful country seat it once was and the area is the richer for their endeavours.

Inquiries about the gardens and house tours should go to the women on 01227 830830.

■ **Colourful gardens await visitors, page 72**



NATURE ZONE: The gardens as they were, with Mrs Walter Wigham

Ref: li 125881



NEW LOOK: Pat Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans in the restored garden

Ref: li 125932

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From previous page

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They also provide tours of the house, but only the restored parts.

"I don't think we realised just how lovely it was all going to be," said Amanda, who added that they had first discovered the building for sale whilst on a shopping trip.

"We popped in for a nose round and thought it would be lovely to have a go at restoring it."

Early tenders were unsuccessful but those who outbid them failed to make a start on essential work and it went back on the market again.

Having returned its original name they are

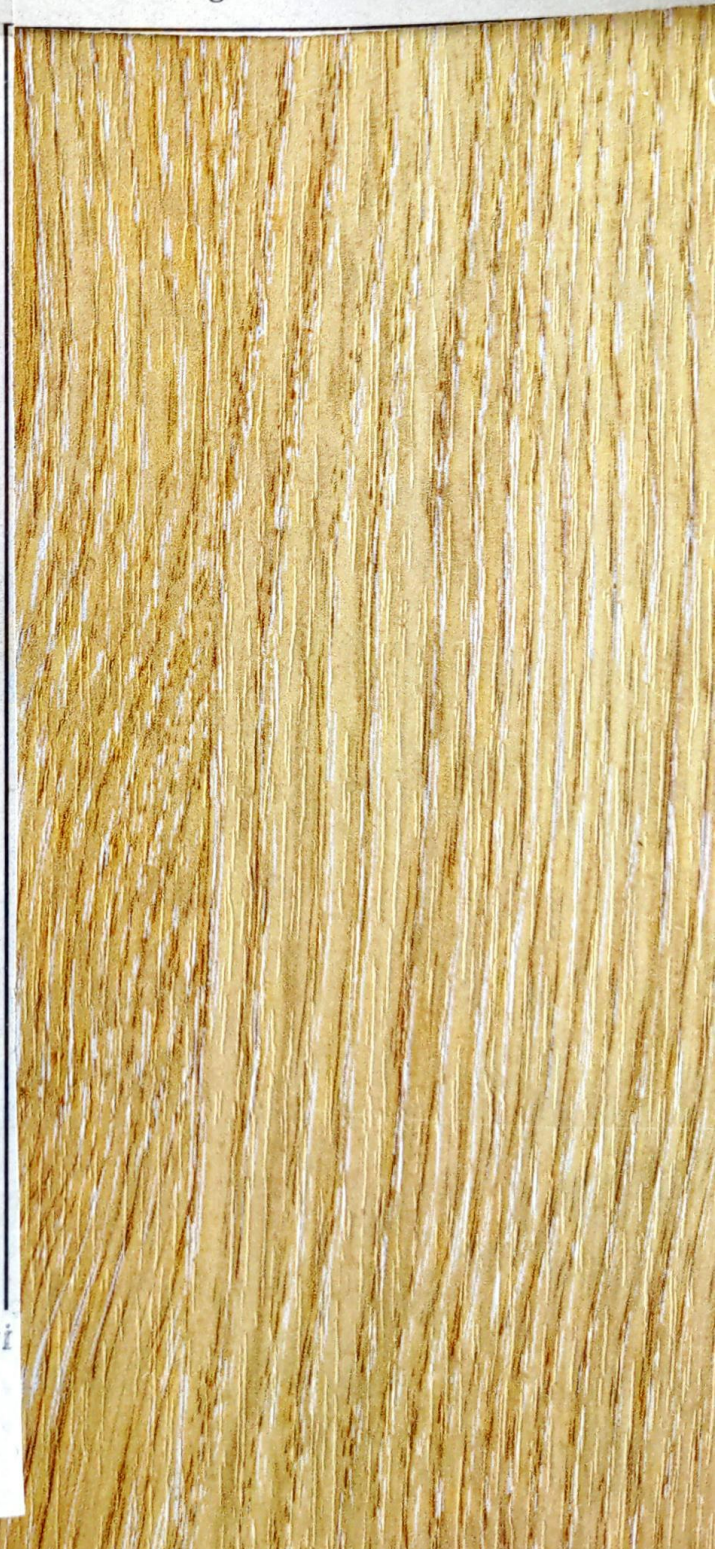
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FACTFILE

- HIGHAM Park was originally given to the de Hegham family by Edward II.
- Other owners have been Thomas Culpeper, who lost his head in Henry VIII's reign, and the Wigham family.
- It was requisitioned by the army in the Second World War and left in a poor state when soldiers moved out.
- It then became a maternity hospital with rooms adapted as wards, rest rooms, an operating theatre and delivery rooms.
- Trains for the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway were built in its grounds and the entrance was once the home of Canterbury racecourse, where proceeds from a meet launched a fund for our first hospital.



Ref: N 152038

no ti

VISITORS to one of the area's stately homes will be able to see progress made in the restoration of the building and its grounds when it opens to the public on Easter Sunday.

As reporter Dianne Stingemore found out, the work at Higham Park has been a labour of love for its owners.

Long-lost delights of park are uncovered

ANOTHER phase in a seemingly endless labour of love is nearing completion for two women restoring one of the area's stately homes.

Their latest project is returning an Italian sunken water garden to its 1930s glory in time for Easter, when they open their gardens to the public for the season.

It is seven years since cousins Amanda Harris-Deans and Pat Gibb bought Higham Court, the former Highland Court Hospital, Bridge, along with Pat's son Barry.

It had been left to fall into disrepair for 12 years and was close to reaching the point of no return when the two women moved in. The historic mansion sits in 24 acres of land, on which they planned to keep and ride their horses.

Impossible is not a word in their vocabulary. They have tackled most repairs themselves, from painting and plastering, working on the roof and decorating the beautiful landmark to the standards of its pre-hospital glory.

And they have transformed the overgrown gardens from wilderness to delightful elegance.

Both were unaware when they started scratching around the grounds as a break from the house repairs that what they had thought was scrub and overgrown meadowland hid a terraced rose garden, a secret garden and the sunken water garden.

The 200ft-long feature was so packed with water lilies that the plants actually supported the

women while they used saws and grappling hooks to clear away five tons of debris, wheelbarrow by wheelbarrow.

What they thought was a rock border turned out to be collapsed dry stone walls.

Clearing about one metre a day, they managed to reveal the skeleton of what had once been a fascinating feature of the house, which had been home to Count Louis Zborowski, who raced cars along Herne Bay seafont.

His vehicles were the inspiration for Ian Fleming's classic Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and the author also stayed at the park.

The surrounding yew tree hedge that had sprouted to an unmanageable 15 feet had to be cut back, walls and paths repaired, the water feature restocked and hours were spent hunting around architectural reclamation yards for other parts.

Thanks to photographs, they have been able to replace with faithful accuracy the missing fountain and temple.

"It was such hard work," said Pat. "We didn't know what we were going to find and we had to fit the gardening in with work on the house."

Since buying the property in 1995, they have restored some 30 of the 87 rooms but say their 10-year plan has probably still got 10 years to go.

They have created a stag walk with herbaceous beds in greys and blues and this year added 2,500 tulip bulbs and countless hundreds of perennials.

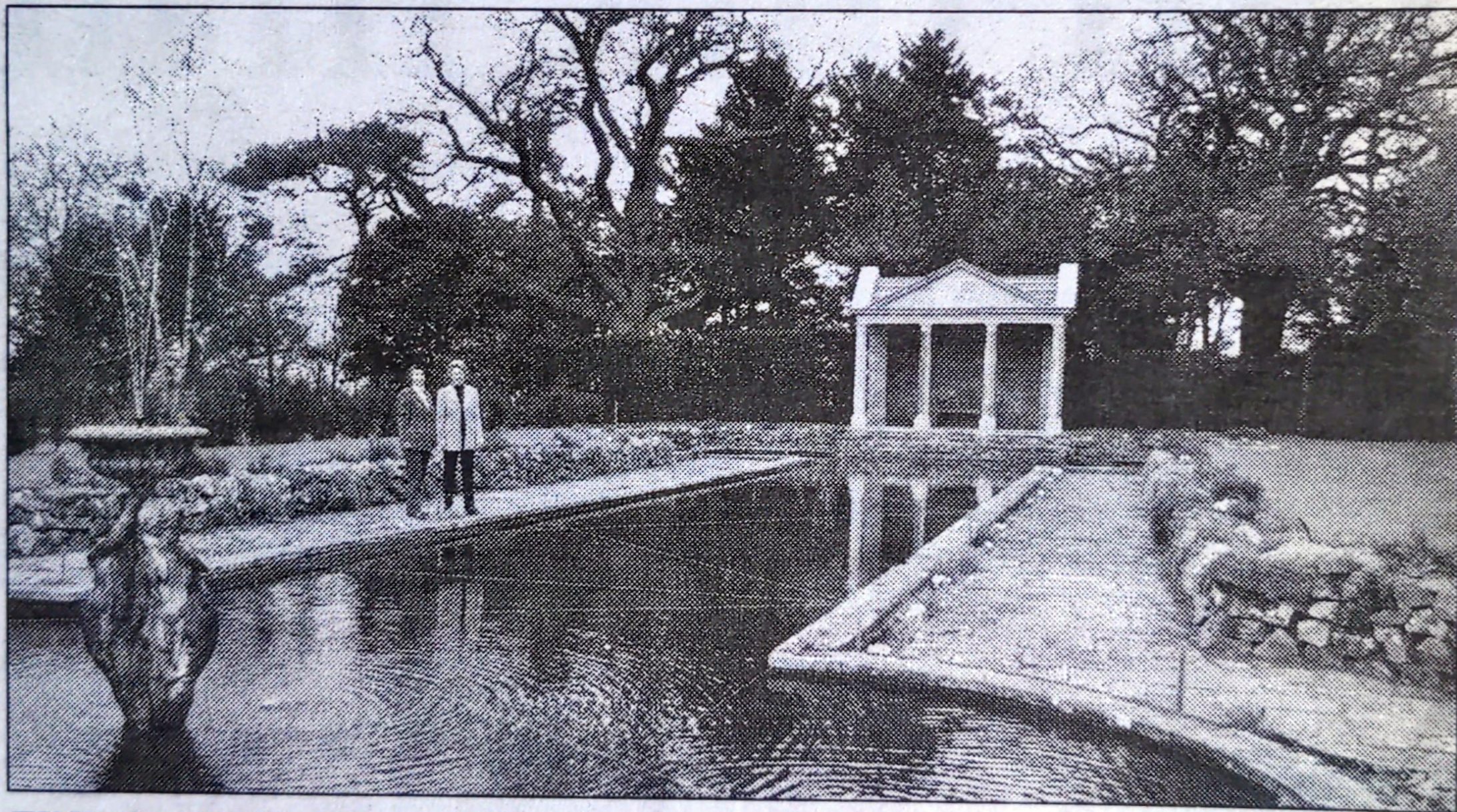
There is a woodland walk with

Continued on next page



OVERGROWN: The garden as it was when Pat Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans took it on
Ref: li 125935

LABOUR OF LOVE AT STATELY HOME



FINE FEATURE: Higham Park Italian sunken water garden, Bridge

Ref: li 125929

A grand place to work

HAPPY memories came back when former nurses visited the place where they had once worked.

The members of the Nurses League were at Higham Place, Bridge, formerly known as Highland Court and once

by **Mike Scott**

attached to the gynaecological department of Kent and Canterbury Hospital.

For many the afternoon visit was first time they had been back and they marvelled at how the building had changed since being bought by Patricia Gibb, her son Barry and cousin Amanda Harris-Deans.

Some had worked there as part of their training course, others were full-time staff on the wards and in the operating theatre – and they all had happy memories.

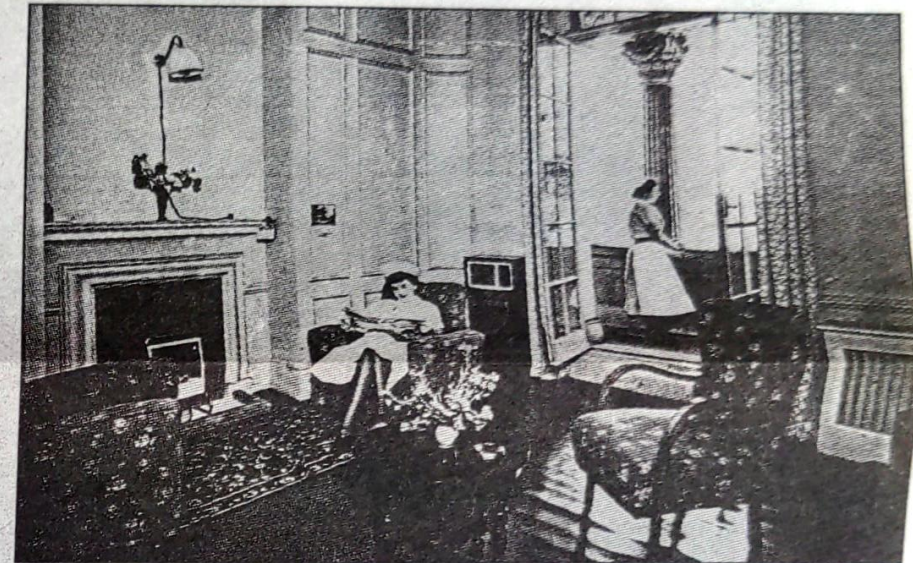
Miss Harris-Deans commented on the National Health Service colour scheme, especially the purple painted doors, when she took the visitors on a guided tour of the house.

Stella Collingwood, of Sturry, said she was a student nurse there one winter in the 1960s.

“It was cold, it was wet and it was miserable but it was great fun,” she said.

“We used to imagine ourselves sweeping down the grand staircase in gorgeous ball gowns, and then falling flat on our faces on the flagstone floor.”

Former community midwife Janet Hastings, from



TIME OUT: Nurses take a break from the wards

Gillingham, said she recalled being there in the winter with snow on the ground.

“There was no public transport at the weekends and I used to walk from Canterbury alone to get to work.

“If a lorry stopped and offered me a lift I was glad to accept.”

Parts of the house had no electricity and she could remember going to bed by candlelight.

“Some of the patients were here for long periods. If they had experienced a bad pregnancy they were given several months rest.”

Betty Holman, from

Littlebourne, was a member of the regular staff between 1963 and 1967.

She said the average length of stay for a patient was a fortnight.

Her colleague Mary Mynot, of Deal, said most of the people who trained at Higham came from Kent.

She did not remember the house being particularly cold, the ground floor where the patients were looked after was always warm.

The nurses quarters could have been chilly, but staff were so glad to get to bed they probably did not notice.

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MEMORIES COME FLOODING BACK WHEN FORMER NURSES VISIT HIGHAM PLACE



STEP BACK IN TIME: Stella Collingwood, from Sturry, on the staircase



RETURN VISIT: Former nurses who worked at Higham Place when it was Highland Hospital

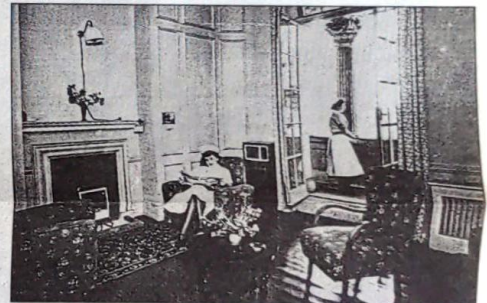
Ref: pd 72589

A grand place to work

by Mike Scott

HAPPY memories came back when former nurses visited the place where they had once worked. The members of the Nurses League were at Higham Place, Bridge, formerly known as Highland Court and once

attached to the gynaecological department of Kent and Canterbury Hospital. For many the afternoon visit was first time they had been back and they marvelled at how the building had changed since being bought by Patricia Gibb, her son Barry and cousin Amanda Harris-Deans. Some had worked there as part of their training course, others were full-time staff on the wards and in the operating theatre - and they all had happy memories.



Miss Harris-Deans commented on the National Health Service colour scheme, especially the purple painted doors, when she took the visitors on a guided tour of the house. Stella Collingwood, of Sturry, said she was a student nurse there one winter in the 1960s. "It was cold, it was wet and it was miserable but it was great fun," she said. "We used to imagine ourselves sweeping down the grand staircase in gorgeous ball gowns, and then falling flat on our faces on the flagstone floor." Former community midwife Janet Hastings, from

Littlebourne, was a member of the regular staff between 1963 and 1967. She said the average length of stay for a patient was a fortnight. Her colleague Mary Mynot, of Deal, said most of the people who trained at Higham came from Kent. She did not remember the house being particularly cold, the ground floor where the patients were looked after was always warm. The nurses quarters could have been chilly, but staff were so glad to get to bed they probably did not notice. Gillingham, said she recalled being there in the winter with snow on the ground. "There was no public transport at the weekends and I used to walk from Canterbury alone to get to work. "If a lorry stopped and offered me a lift I was glad to accept." Parts of the house had no electricity and she could remember going to bed by candlelight. "Some of the patients were here for long periods. If they had experienced a bad pregnancy they were given several months rest." Betty Holman, from

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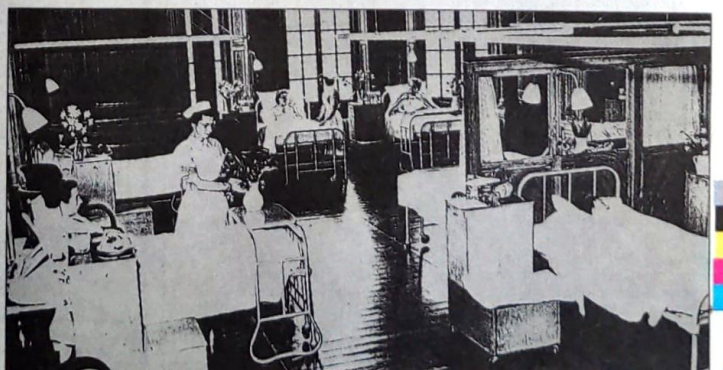
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KM Chatham Navy Days 2002 is organised by Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, The Historic Dockyard, Chatham, Kent ME4 4TZ. Tel 01634 823800.

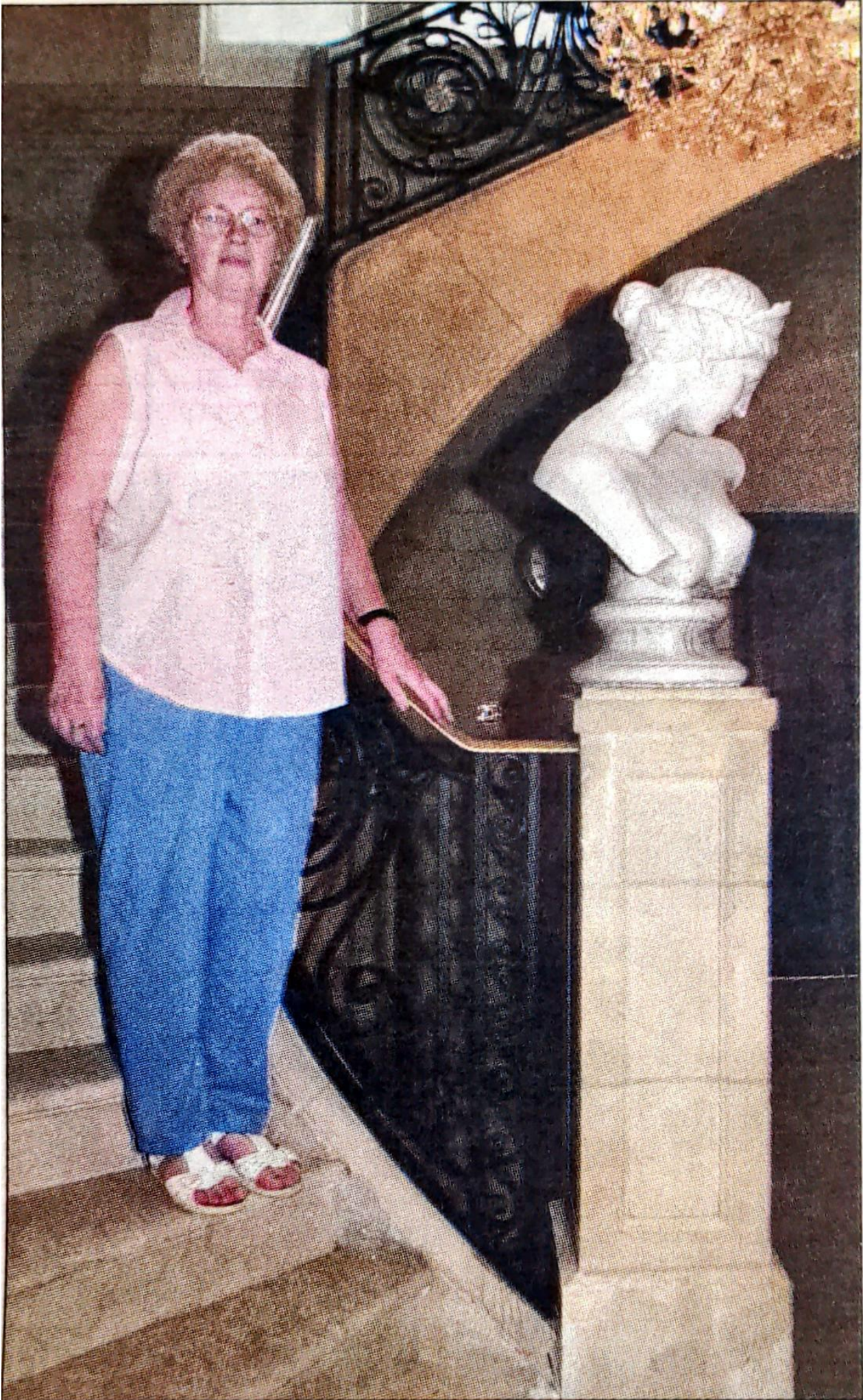
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PLACE OF WORK: One of the wooden-paneled wards

CMK



STEP BACK IN TIME: Stella Collingwood, from Sturry,
on the staircase *Ref: pd 72588*

ING BACK WHEN FORMER NURSES VISIT HIGHAM PLACE



RETURN VISIT: Former nurses who worked at Higham Place when it was Highland Hospital

Ref: pd 72589

NURSES who worked at a Georgian stately home that was an offshoot of Kent and Canterbury Hospital were amazed when they were given a guided tour of the transformed house.

Higham Park at Bridge was an obstetrics and gynaecological unit until the mid 1960s, when it was closed and fell into disrepair.

But owners Pat Gibb and Amanda Harris-Deans have set about restoring its former glory – and invited 36 members of the Kent and Canterbury Nurses League to have a look.

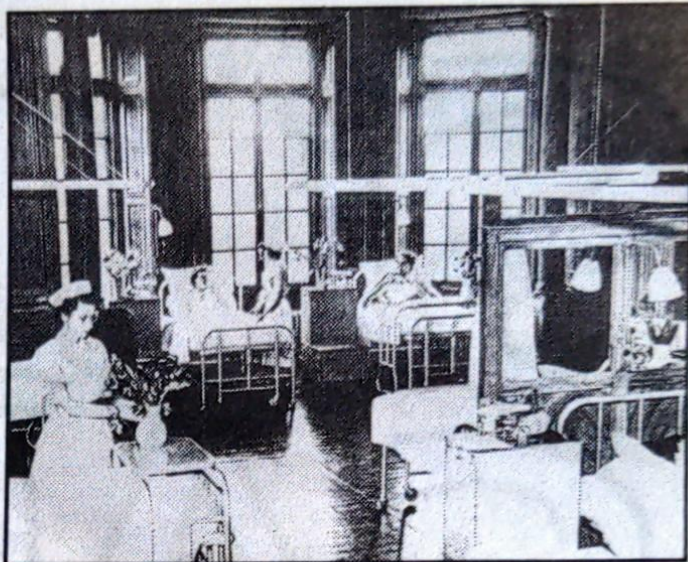
Winter

Moira Gower was a young student nurse during the vicious winter of 1962-63. She said: "It used to be very draughty and we felt it particularly that winter. I was amazed when I saw the house because it is looking really lovely."

Moira has been nursing at the Kent and Canterbury since 1960, apart from breaks to have her two children.

She said: "The League had more people

Story by IAN READ

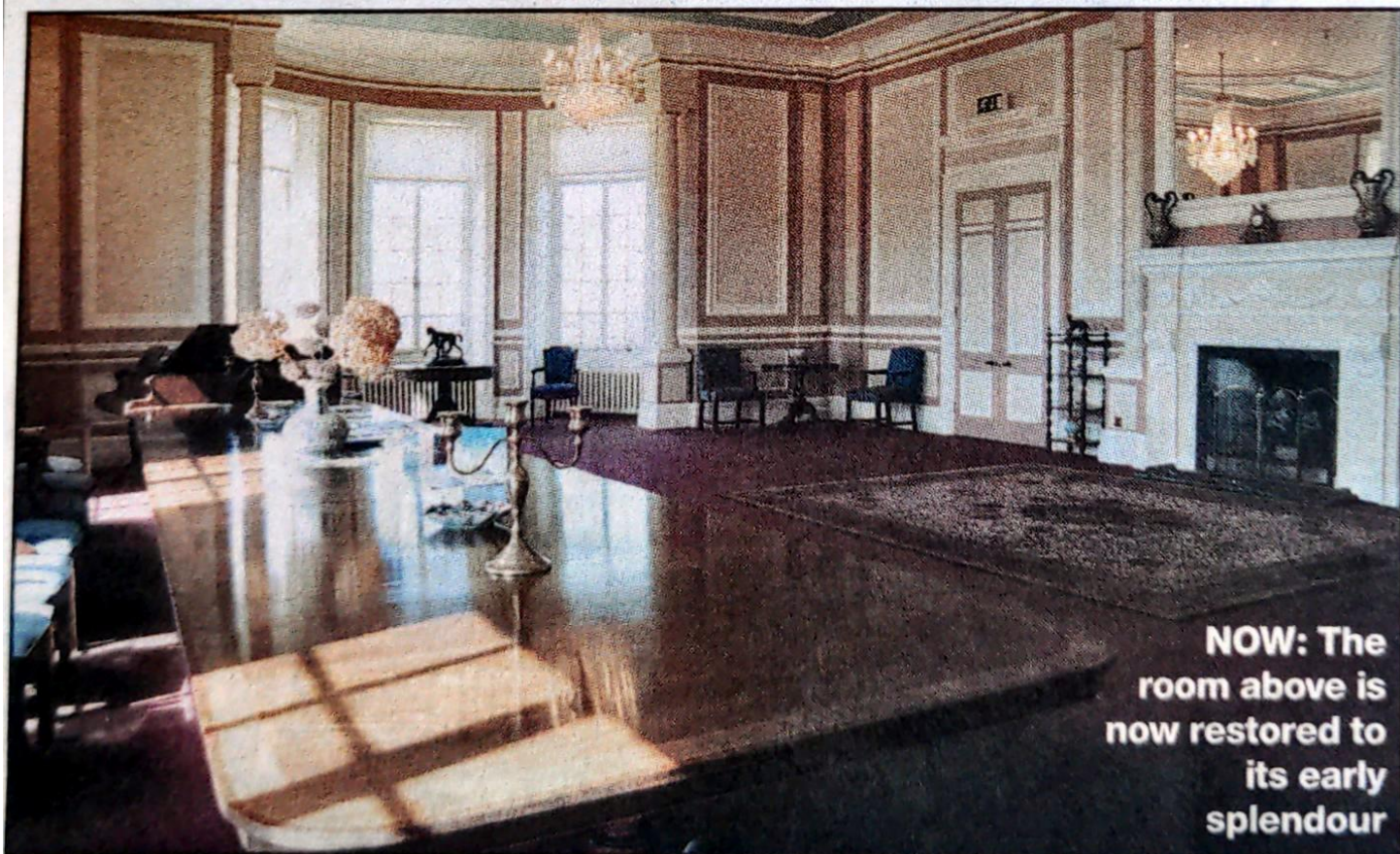


THEN: A ward in the old hospital

than usual at the Higham Park meeting. Everyone enjoyed themselves."

Amanda Harris-Deans said since the visit nurses have been bringing in pictures which have been copied as part of the archive for the 18th century house.

She said: "We have been learning a great deal about life at the house when it was a hospital. Some of the things we have heard have been fascinating."



NOW: The room above is now restored to its early splendour

THE WAY WE WERE



**Nurses return
to see how
the old place
has changed**



REUNION: The nurses gather to talk about old times. INSET: A minute to relax back in the 50s

NURSES who worked at a

St. Mary's Hospital

Women behaving madly

Amanda Harris-Deans and Patricia Gibb have spent all their money on a dilapidated mansion. Five years on, they have stretched their budget by restoring it themselves. *Sarah Lonsdale* pays them a visit



Patricia Gibb was given a scaffolding tower for her birthday. "I was over the moon — just what I wanted," says the 59-year-old grandmother. "We were using tooth picks to remove old paint from the plaster mouldings on the ceiling and the tower really saved my neck from cricking. Perhaps a Jaeger suit would have been more appropriate for someone my age, but the tower was so much more useful."

Five years ago Patricia and her 49-year-old friend, Amanda Harris-Deans, were living a life of genteel semi-retirement. Both owned their own homes — Patricia in a village just outside Canterbury, Amanda in the town itself — and both were more than comfortably off, breeding horses as a

hobby, but otherwise whiling away their days as ladies of leisure. Aside from changing the odd lightbulb and sanding the occasional window frame, neither of them knew the first thing about DIY.

Then, in 1995, they did something their friends considered completely batty. With Patricia's son, Barry, they sold their homes and bought Higham Park, an 87-room stately home outside Canterbury, for just under £1 million. The house, a former residence of Countess Margaret Zborowski (née Astor) and her son, Count Louis, who created the original *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* motor car there, had been derelict for years.

"We were living nearby and one day we saw this enormous 'For Sale'

Continued over leaf

It's the real thing

Mackintosh's £250,000 room

P5



Buyer beware

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P6-7



Plus

Inside story

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Diary of a self-builder

P9

Property clinic

P13

My first home

Anne McKeivitt rubbishes it

P3



Saturday June 24 2000

The Daily Telegraph

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Women doing it for themselves: Patricia Gibb (left) and Amanda Harris-Deans outside Higham Park



Women behaving madly

Amanda Harris-Deans and Patricia Gibb have spent all their money on a dilapidated mansion. Five years on, they have stretched their budget by restoring it themselves. *Sarah Lonsdale* pays them a visit



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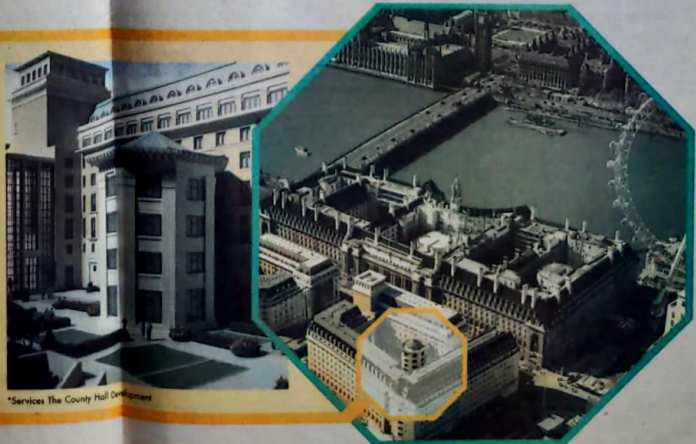
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