

# Genteel decline



## Plate made in about 1820

The fame of the house and park lasted well into the Nineteenth Century. Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey*, published in 1817, makes several mentions of the place. Catherine, the heroine exclaims: "Oh! I am in such ecstasies at the thoughts of a little country air and quiet! - We shall drive directly to Clifton - and, as soon as dinner is over, if there is time for it, go on to Kingsweston". This transfer-printed plate is an encapsulation of that celebrity.



## Penpole Lane seen in the 1850s

Kings Weston continued to attract visitors from the fast-expanding suburbs of Bristol, offering an attractive excursion for early photographers. The carriage posed in the foreground of this view along Penpole Lane looking towards Wood Lodge probably belongs to the photographer. The opening of Avonmouth Docks in 1877 marked the beginning of the decline for Kings Weston as industry and housing encroached on its rural setting.



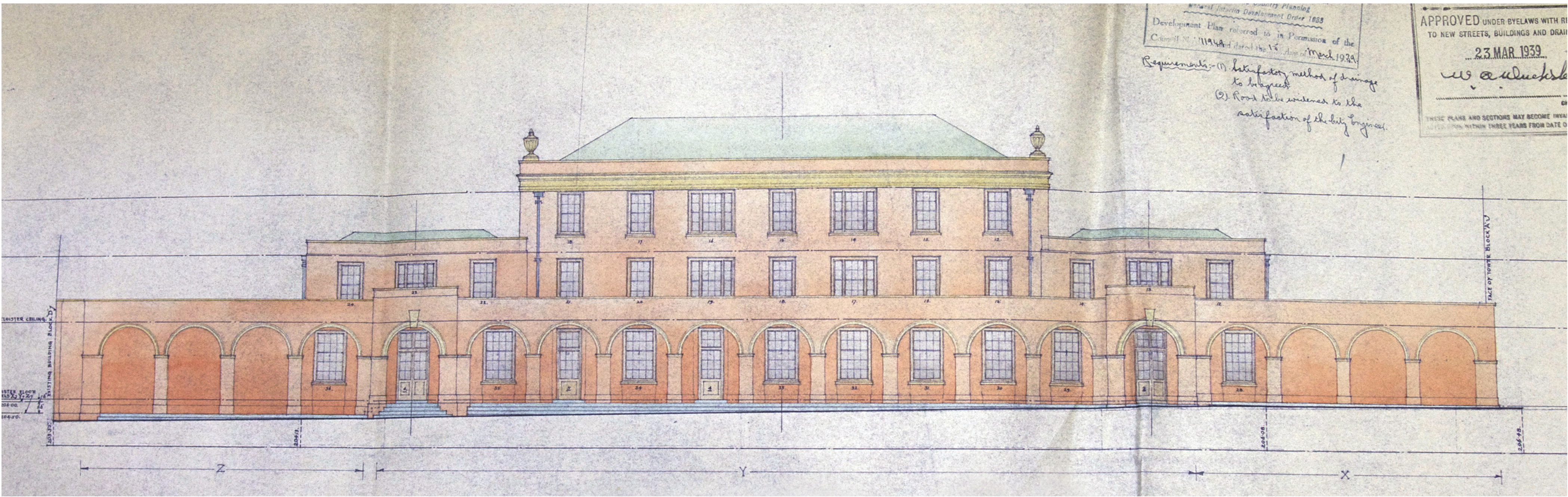
## Train below Shirehampton Park c.1900

Already by 1865 the peace and tranquillity of Kings Weston had been broken as the Bristol Port and Pier Railway cut through Shirehampton Park, robbing the pleasure grounds of their connection to the river. Further incursions were made when the deep cutting for the Portway was excavated. When it opened in 1926 these excavations must have greatly contributed to its £800,000 cost that made it the most expensive road then built in Britain.



## First World War service

After the outbreak of war in 1914 the Napier Miles family made Kings Weston available to the government as a hospital for the large numbers of wounded troops returning from Europe. The house and grounds must have provided welcome respite from the horrors of war for those brought here to recuperate. These two views come from a short series of postcards showing patients and nurses enjoying the gardens. A plaque mounted over the main door of the house commemorates its service during the First World War.



## Between the wars

Philip Napier Miles was squire of Kings Weston from 1881. He was an enthusiastic philanthropist who donated land in Shirehampton for the construction of the Public Hall and, after the Great War, donated the Shirehampton Park portion of Kings Weston Estate to the National Trust. By 1904 this land was leased as a golf club, a use that continues today. Napier Miles was also composed music, and was a friend and patron of the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams who regularly visited Kings Weston. Napier Miles persuaded Williams to revisit his composition "The Lark Ascending" during one of these stays and the now famous piece was first performed in 1920 in

Shirehampton Public Hall. A tune called "Kingsweston" was also a fond recollection of his time spent at the house.

Philip died childless in 1935 and his wife Sybil sold much of the estate over the following years. Rather than continue living alone in the big house she had a smaller home built in the former walled kitchen garden. Into this she transferred many fixtures from the old house including fireplaces and Cuban mahogany doors. When she put the house up for auction in 1938 it was purchased by Bristol Municipal

Charities. They intended to relocate Queen Elizabeth's Hospital School from the centre of Bristol to a more modern and spacious campus. In 1939 they demolished the old kitchens and began building a series of brick dormitories. Within months the outbreak of war halted progress and the school never arrived. The ruins of the unfinished works still encroach on the lawns to the south of the house today.



**KINGS  
WESTON  
ACTION  
GROUP**

Kings Weston Action Group  
c/o 75A Alma Road, Bristol, BS8 2DW  
For further information  
Tel. 07811 6666 71  
email. KWactiongroup@gmail.com

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