

Post-War Decay

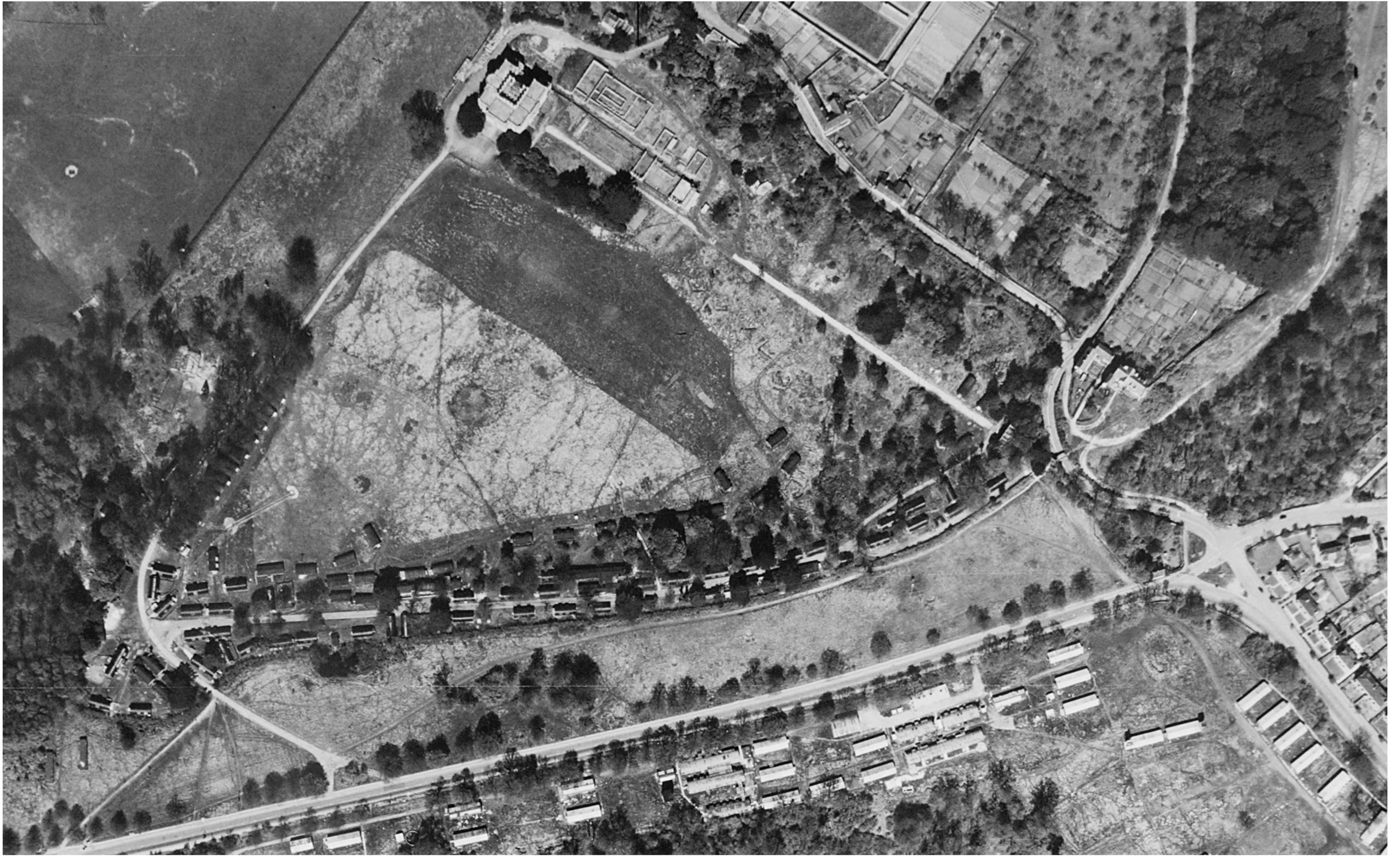


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Aerial View of Kings Weston in 1947. Nissen huts densely pepper the park and the walk to the echo has lost most of its trees. The ruins of the incomplete QEHS School can be clearly seen.

Under threat

During the Second World War Kings Weston and Shirehampton Parks were requisitioned by the government and extensive barracks were built as a staging camp to house troops arriving in Avonmouth from North America. The impact on the landscape can clearly be seen from the aerial photograph above. Although the house remained out of bounds for troops the park and its buildings suffered neglect and vandalism during this period. After the war the camp was briefly used to house workers who were extending Filton airfield to accommodate the Bristol Brabazon.

Already in 1947 Lord Methuen was expressing concern in the House of Lords over the condition of the house and landscape and he urged the Government to consider scheduling it as an historic monument. Lord Henderson responded by unveiling new proposals to 'List' buildings of architectural or historical interest and eventually, in 1959 the house was listed Grade I.

Plans to relocate QEHS School were abandoned after the war but in the early 1950's the house briefly served as a primary school during the construction of permanent facilities on the new Lawrence Weston Estate. It was later sold to the Bristol College of Science and Technology for use as their school of architecture. In 1968 the college sought to extend their ownership to develop a colossal new polytechnic on the site. Whilst these proposals would have preserved the house they would have destroyed most of the park. Fortunately the project changed focus and the proposals for a concrete campus moved to Bath where it would develop into the present University on Claverton Down.



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Old meets new

Lawrence Weston Estate was begun in 1947 as an ambitious and progressive scheme to re-house families after the war. However this progress came at the cost of much of the landscaped park to the north of Kings Weston House. Seen here in 1949, the grand old house contrasts with modern homes along Mancroft Avenue. The houses on Barrowmead Drive in the foreground are yet to be started. Some of the ornamental trees were integrated into the design of the estate, as was Home Farm.



Lost landmark

Sadly Penpole Lodge, one of Kings Weston's most important buildings, did not survive long enough to receive the protection of Listed Building Status. Not even a campaign launched by Country Life could save the building, and after a prolonged period of decay Bristol City Council demolished the building in 1950 as a dangerous structure.

In 1958 the stables were threatened with demolition too. Happily, at the eleventh hour, a new use was found and they were converted for use as a Police Station.



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Fallen

Seen here in a photo from 1958 by Reece Winstone, the Echo appears derelict and abandoned. The statue, now headless, lies fallen from her plinth amongst the debris of the collapsed roof. In the early 1990s the Bristol Building Preservation Trust restored the Echo to the condition seen today.

The body of the statue later found its way into the basement of the house where it stood in the student architects' common room. The statue seems to have been lost after the college moved out in 1970. Recent efforts to relocate it have so far proved fruitless.



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