

# The Great Court.

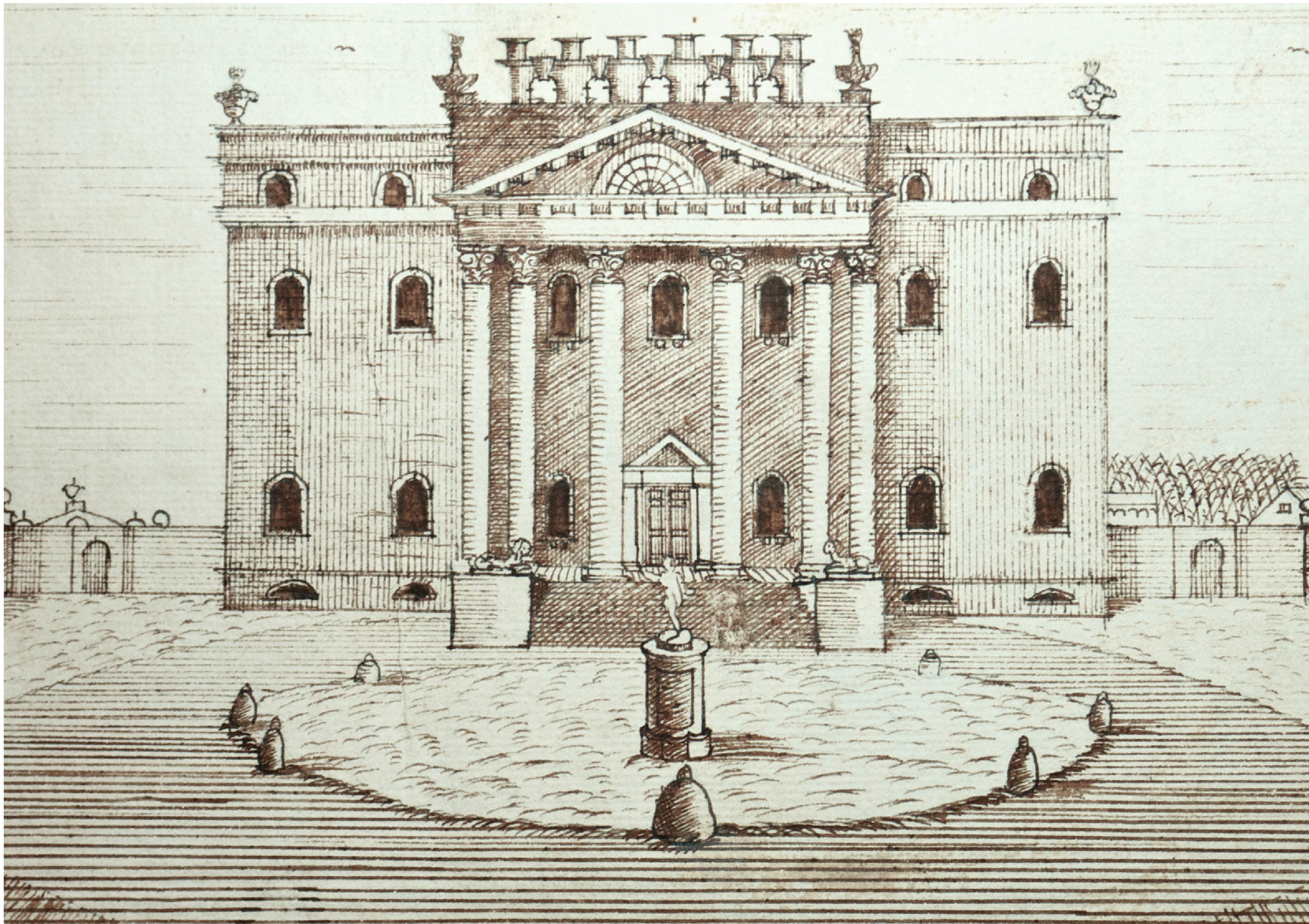


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**The Great Court.** A drawing made in 1746 by James Stewart, a Bristol school-teacher. The roof of the Loggia and Brewhouse can be glimpsed in the background.

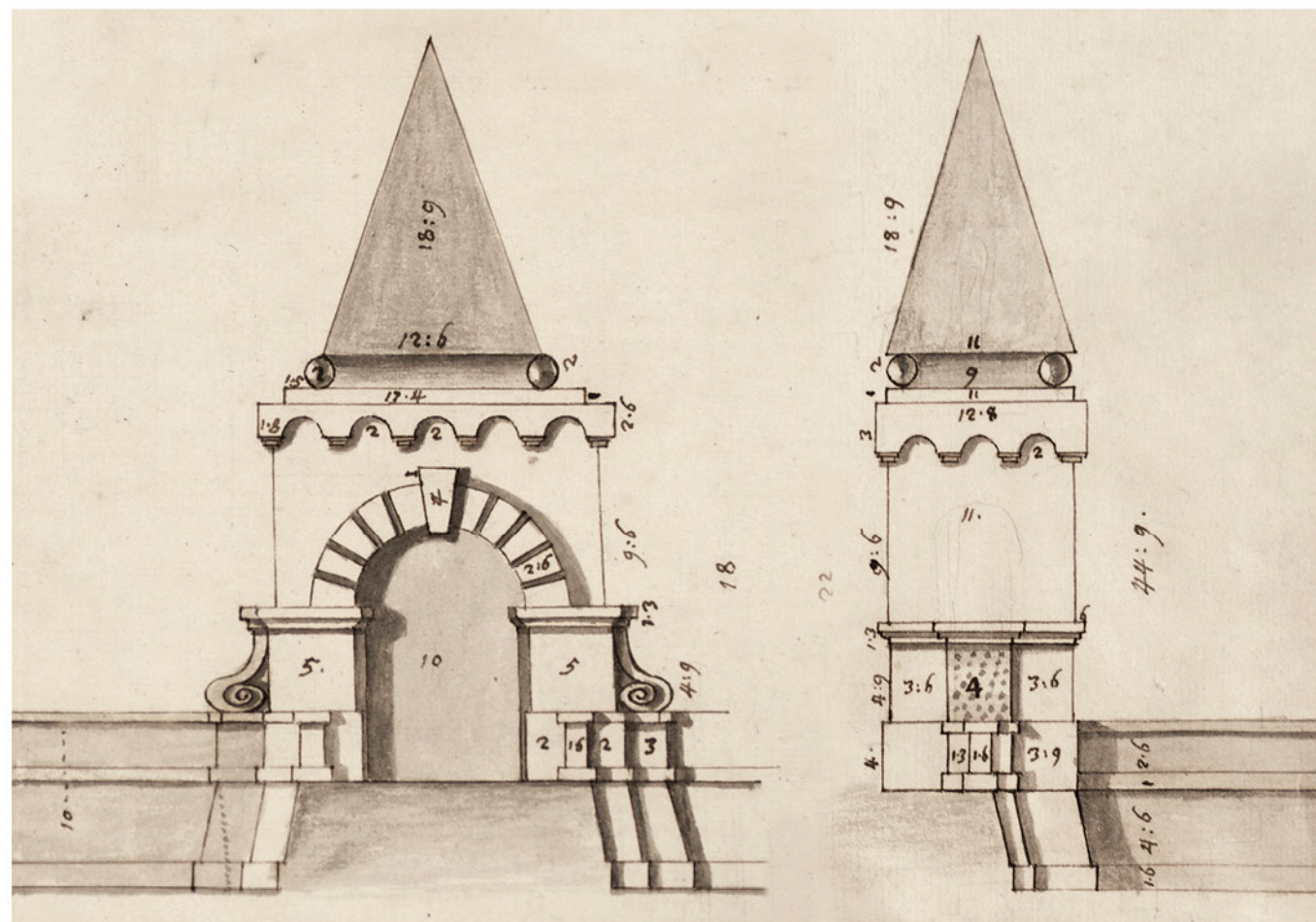


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## The unrealised gate

A rectangular walled courtyard was designed by Vanbrugh to frame the entrance front of Kings Weston House, creating a formal setting for the building. His original proposal of 1718 was a stone archway surmounted by pyramid forming an entrance to the court; a smaller version of a gate he built at Castle Howard. The Gate was approached over a ditch or fosse by means of a short causeway. Only the outer wall of the great court were built and simpler gates were substituted for the original design.

Vanbrugh did manage to introduce an equally formidable and martial looking structure with his great terrace that once overlooked the Severn. The modern replacement outside the tearoom is a fraction of the size of the original and projects out over the slope half as far as its predecessor. The Loggia once terminated the view along this mock fortification.

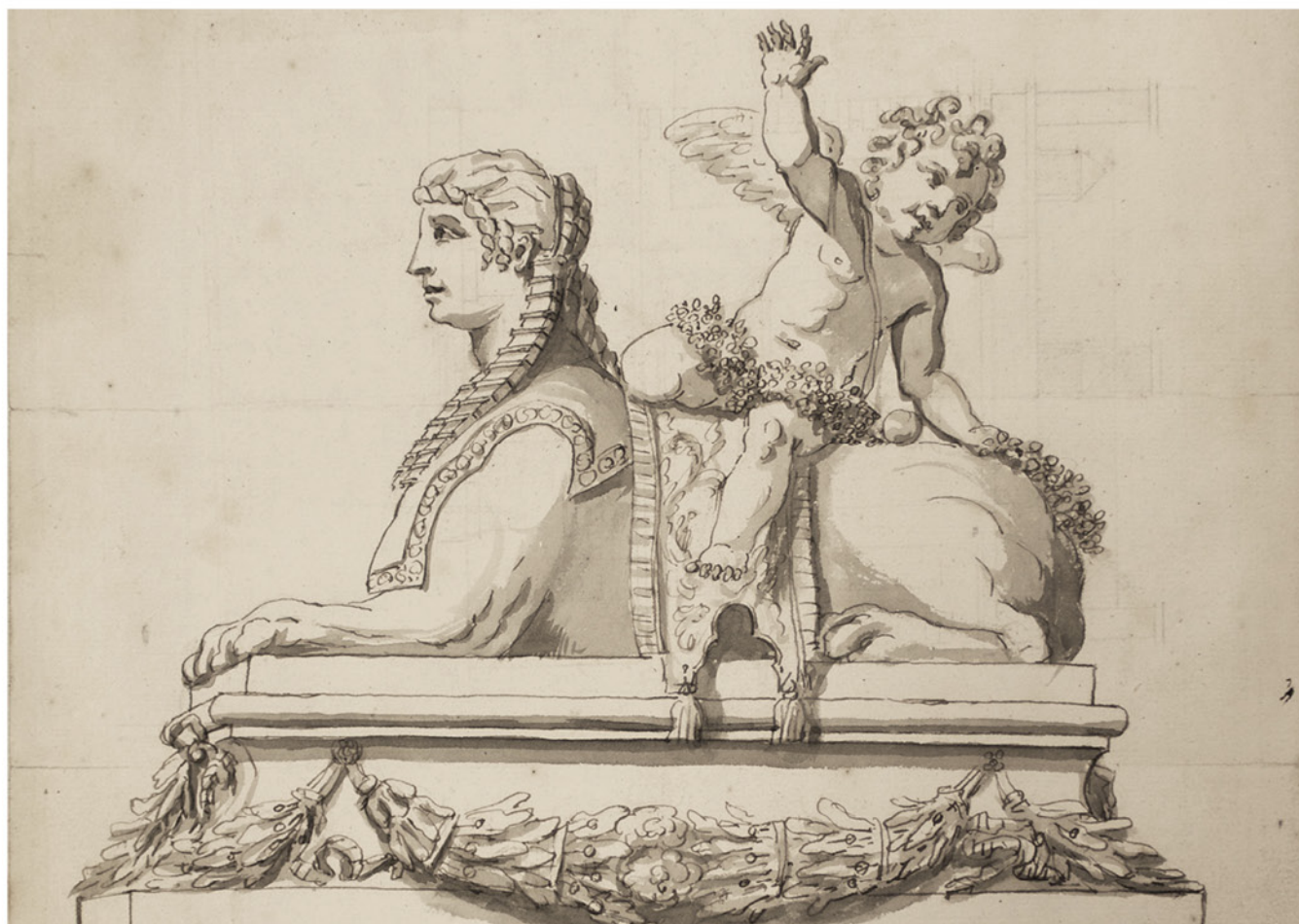


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## The lost sphinx

A detailed inspection of Stewart's drawing reveals a pair of sphinxes guarding the steps up to the main door. A design for these sculptures exists in the Kings Weston Book of Drawings and is one of the most elaborate it contains. The drawing is titled 'For the cheeks of the Great steps at Kingsweston', but the bronze winged cupids riding the beasts do not appear to have been executed. The drawing is in fact a copy of a print, published in about 1676 by Jean Lepautre, of an identical sphinx in the gardens of Versailles, an appropriately grand source for Kings Weston, and a place Vanbrugh had probably visited.

It is not known what became of these sculptures when, in 1767 the steps were rebuilt without the stone piers on which the sphinxes sat. It may be that the whole of the Great Court was dismantled at the same time, as the fashion for formal gardens declined.



## An escaped statue

Today this formidable statue of Hercules wielding his club and clad in the skin of the Lion of Cithaeron decorates the nearby gardens of Goldney House, Clifton. However it is thought that this is the same sculpture seen in the centre of the Great Court at Kings Weston in 1746. The plinth shown in the drawing roughly matches the plinth at Goldney and the suggestion is further supported by a measured drawing for an almost matching plinth in the Kings Weston Book of Drawings. The statue, cast in lead, has been attributed to the eminent Flemish sculptor John Nost. Dates between 1710 and 1720 have been suggested, fitting in with the construction period at Kings Weston. Amongst other important commissions Nost also provided lead statues for the gardens of Castle Howard.

Hercules is first recorded at Goldney in 1768, just a year after the Great Court at Kings Weston is likely to have been dismantled. Now in the ownership of Bristol University the statue is unlikely to return to Kings Weston, where once he kept unwelcome house guests at bay.



**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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