

# Written in a Library

Kingewton Gardens, 1684-5.

By CHARLES WELLS

A kind friend sends me an interesting letter written by Sir Robert Southwell to Mr. Evelyn, who, as everybody knows, was an authority on trees and gardens and on many other things that matter, himself as a diarist. There are references in the diary to his worthy friend, Sir Robert, whom he describes as "a sober, wise, and virtuous gentleman," and Evelyn took some trouble to substitute Sir Robert's name for his own when, in November 1690, the Royal Society desired to elect Evelyn as president. Southwell held the place for three or four years. The letter is copied from a "Diary of the Times of Charles II." by the Hon. Henry Sidney, published in 1842, and runs:—

King's Weston,  
8th January, 1684-5.

Honoured Sir;

I will not trouble you with the accidents of this late acknowledgment so full and so obliging a letter as I had from you of the 11th of November last. I will fall directly to our plants, which perhaps will piss with you as the present communication.

I am here in a bleak situation, which has inclined me to affect such greens as best resist all weathers. I shall, in the spring, proceed by all those cautions you give in reference to the holly. I have King's Wood near at hand, and so can with ease take reprisals for what I lost the last winter, which, perhaps, was full one-half of what I planted. With my cypress-trees I had much better fortune, for of twenty-two I lost but one, having exposed the rest as you prescribe. I had a bay-tree, and so hopeful as it deserved painting; the body thereof was of the thickness of my arm, quite cloven through with the cold; but, being out close to the ground, I have this year several shoots of two feet high. I have most nourishing laurels, which were not touched; and, though the artichokes and rosemary quite quick round me were destroyed, yet I have hopeful offsprings of both, which did escape. Thus you see I brag of [a few words here illegible] but I take better aim to proceed in the future, and to become most conversant with that which will best take care for itself—I mean the propagation of yew.

Forest of Dean Yew.

Upon the receipt of your letter, which did truly enlighten me how to proceed herein, and to avoid the extravagant demands of the gardeners, which from

London was 10d. and from Oxford 1d. the ship, and there nothing now to be had, it came into my head to have send the following from the Forest of Dean, which is bottomed on twelve miles off, but on the other side of the Severn. This I did, and in one week they brought me home 300 plants, all admirably rooted, and in some them one to four and five foot high, mostly generally from two or three.

It was about the middle of the last month when I received this stock, and I presently set 200 of them in a square and elsewhere, in order to the lining of the walls, and because they cost me all chargea borne, but three shillings per plant. I sent my leatherit ambassadours once more again that as I might have choice to my mind, and they, in one other week, brought me home a like quantity as before. 'Tis true the frost and Christmas have hitherto hindered our further proceedings, but I resolve to line all my walls with this plant, which you so celebrate, and do hope, though you do recommend the shade as most propitious to them, you considering from how barren & misery they are taken, and how well I am provided to load them with water, that they may prosper even against a south wall. But now give me leave to own to you a prospect that I am almost intreated within, and which has sprung from this choice and plenty of yew-tress, which I find at hand. My parlour-garden has a fair opening into my orchard, and in the middle of this there is a space left of 120 yards long and 20 feet broad, in which I designed a walk of the black walnuts, but now I resolved to take rather what is at hand, and to erect in this place a close walk of yews, which, if I can arrive to, it will be the only close winter-walk that I have here.

In order hereunto, I will hold the breadth of 20 feet, but in the rows the trees shall stand only at 6 feet distance. Every second tree shall have the principal or master branch left growing straight, as for ornament, but all the rest to be banded in due time, till they meet from either side and make the close covering or canopy pretended. This is the thing in general I would do, and I tell it to you with earnest expectation of your opinion and assistance. I would know how high the root ought to be for this length and breadth, or how high we may expect it, and what care is to be exercised to have all things prosper.

The trees I am going to plant are, some of them, four, some five foot high, and stripp'd to the two upper stories,

I take the greatest care of those from whom we may expect a topping branch, and less of each second tree, which is to wholly bent over, and I venture on this, though his top or head branch be broken off. I consider when any fail, we can send to the forest for just the true size we want; and if you think the bottoms of all these trees will remain naked and so admit more sun and wind than would be fit, we may for remedy place between each four either the same bushy plants or some slips which will come up soon enough for the rest. This walk runs E.S.E. and W.N.W., and the soil is a good rich land which produces excellent apples, and in the meadows adjoining very good hay.

#### Lord Weymouth's Prophecy.

But, while I am triumphing in these rustic attempts, as a courtier turned clown, I received from my Lord Weymouth a terrible mortification, for he tells me it is more than probable all my trees will die; that the sap of evergreens is now more sap than in any other season, and that March or August are the only fit times to remove them. His Lordship has this last season put into the ground of all sorts not less than ten thousand plants. He deals with the four Cardinal gardeners, and I fear this is from one of them this sentence against my trees is directed. If they prove fallible I suffer not, but if so, by Friday by March next I may see my fault, and then return and take new counsels from the good Forest of Dean. Sir, I take the boldness to expound all this matter before you, that you may kindly animadvers, and instruct me in what you see amiss.

#### Success with Trees.

In days two generations of fir-trees, which I raised from slender cones, which I procured from the one are of three years' growth, the other of two, which I found of the same kind the year after. The first I am thinking to transplant in April next into their proper stations, by being ten feet high; the others are still very low, which makes me fear my land's rich soil may be too good for them; and if you judge it necessary for me to alloy it, pray let me have your advice, though the gardeners here think very well of it, and in Germany I saw nothing for five or six hundred miles but sand, in which they grow.

#### Quaker's Cider Mill.

I know I have tired you, and yet, for a little variety, give me leave to acquaint you that here in my neighbourhood is one Rogers, a learned famous Quaker. He has erected a cider-mill, which I went, a while since, being four miles off, to visit. 'Tis seated on the Severn, and he buys up all the apples, pears, and crabs of the forest or elsewhere. He has the river his friend for exporting as well as importing. His mill goes with three horses; the apples are squeezed by two iron rollers, somewhat indented; he grinds 500 bushels a day; he could make one thousand hogsheads in a season if he had vent for it, but had yet not exceeded 880 in one year. He

has some rare skill in making it generally good and in all kinds. He sends it to the West Indies, as well as to Ireland and the neighbourhood of Bristol, and is himself an export merchant. His general price is £4 per hogshead, and for some £4; and if any fail of being excellent in the kind, he is so tender of his credit, which is in order to his greater gain, that he converts all the inferior sort to vinegar or brandy, in which also he drives a vigorous trade. He squeezes all in engines, so as in some to equal the weight or pressure of forty tons.

My son is not a little proud that you vouchsafe to make mention of him. He says he will strive to deserve it. He has lately been dealing with the Equines and cube roots, and is now going to taste of Euclid.

May you and your Lady and prosperous offspring live as happy a year as either my wishes or your own conversation can afford.

I am ever, with great acknowledgment of your favours,

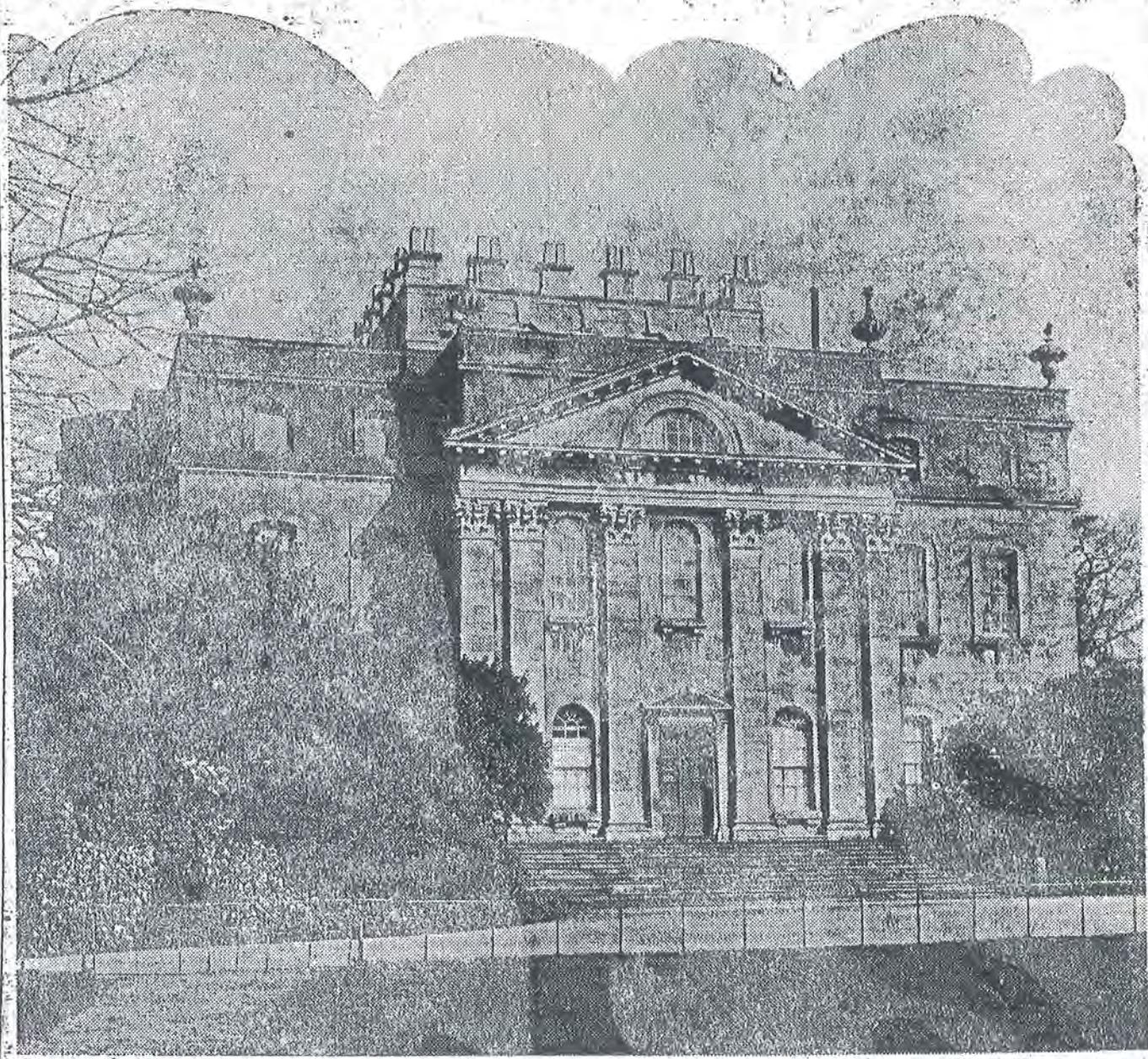
Sir, your most affectionate  
And most humble servant,  
**ROBERT SOUTHWELL.**

#### The Mansion.

Kingweston is one of the country mansions built from the designs of Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), who after achieving considerable success as a playwright, devoted himself mainly to architecture. Blenheim and Castle Howard are his work. Humphrey Hooke, a native of Chichester, who made great wealth in privateering — euphemistically described as "mercantile pursuits" — bought Kingweston and other large estates. He was first elected to the Common Council of Bristol in 1614. But it always was more difficult to keep money than to make it. Sir Humphrey died in 1677 in financial difficulties, and his executors sold Kingweston estate to Sir Robert Southwell. Sir Robert was a distinguished diplomatist who ended his career in the service of the country as Chief Secretary for Ireland, to which office he was appointed in 1690. He died about four years afterwards. In 1690 he had the honour of receiving William III. at Kingweston on his return from the battle of the Boyne. His Majesty arrived in Kingroad on September 6th, and on the 7th passed through Bristol on his way to Badminton to stay with the Duke of Beaufort. At Frome Gate the Mayor and Corporation received the King, and preceded him, bareheaded, to Lawford's Gate. The only official expenses recorded in this connection were £6, "paid to six soldiers going in the city's arms," and 10s, "disbursed at the Council House." Latimer tells us we may disregard the local tradition that in the eighteenth century a £1,000 walled-up in the Civil War period was discovered in the mansion, containing records of a barony granted to the Southwell family by Henry III.

In the year 1833 the estate was bought for £210,000 by Mr. Philip John Miles, of Leigh Court, from Lord de Clifford, a descendant of Sir Robert Southwell.

# ONCE OWNED BY KINGS



**OLD BRISTOL, No. 20.**  
King's Weston House was designed for Sir Edward Southwell by Sir John Vanbrugh about 1710, and was completed ten years later. The estate was purchased by Sir Robert Southwell in 1679, and remained in the hands of his descendants until just over a hundred years ago, when it was bought by Mr. Philip John Miles, grandfather of Dr. P. Napier Miles, the late owner, whose widow now owns the property. As the name denotes, King's Weston was once Royal property, and was granted by King Henry II. to Robert FitzHarding ancestor of the Berkeley family. In 1568 it was bought by Sir Edward Wintour, and was later owned by the Hooches, from whom Sir Robert Southwell purchased it. Of the old house nothing now remains. The present house contains many fine art treasures.

### Queen Elizabeth's Hospital

THE announcement that Queen Elizabeth's Hospital, or, as it is more often called, the City School, is to move from its present fortress-like building on Brandon Hill to Kingsweston must have interested a great number of Bristolians. And there are old boys who hardly know what to think of the change—whether to be glad, or sorry, for many generations of boys have been educated there during the last 30 years. The ancient school has had singularly few moves during the 347 years it has exerted its educational influence on the youth of Bristol. Its first home was the Mansion House of Queen's Hospital by Denmark Street; here it remained until 1708, when it moved to St. Bartholomew's Hospital at the bottom of Christmas Street, and in 1847 the school was transferred to the high and healthy environment of Brandon Hill. It is, or should be, a matter of common knowledge that John Carr, a prosperous soap maker, founded the school, and that a charter for it was granted by Queen Elizabeth in March, 1590. This instrument—a beautifully illuminated document representing her Majesty delivering the charter to the Mayor and aldermen of Bristol—is still in the possession of the Municipal Trustees, who have controlled the school since 1836.

### Kingsweston House

KINGSWESTON House, which has been acquired as the site of the new Q.E.H. home, is an interesting and historic old place. It was built in the early years of the 18th century, regardless of expense, by Edward Southwell, who long represented Bristol in Parliament, and achieved the dignity of Secretary of State for Ireland. Although payment of members is quite a modern arrangement, it was customary over a long period for the Corporation to acknowledge the services of its M.P. in some tangible form, and the city archives include an acknowledgment by Mr. Southwell of 12 dozen bottles of sherry. Kingsweston House was a popular resort for voters during election times, and the "Gloucester Journal" of November 27, 1739, states: "The Hon. Mr. Southwell has kept open house at Shirehampton ever since he has declared. There are constantly employed a baker, a butcher, and two brewers, to provide for the reception of all comers and goers." Mr. Southwell's name is perpetuated in Southwell Street, Kingsdown. Kingsweston House and gardens have been splendidly maintained by the Miles family. The gardens were so famous that during the time Bath was at the height of its social prosperity and renown an excursion to Kingsweston House was a regular and popular incident in the gay season. Whether the old mansion is to survive and be incorporated in new buildings or demolished for entirely new school premises has not yet transpired.

# KINGSWESTON WILL BE PRESERVED

## Assurance to Lord Methuen

LORD METHUEN in the House of Lords yesterday asked the Government to consider scheduling Kings Weston, near Bristol, as an Ancient Monument, and to have its 18th century fireplaces replaced.

He said Kings Weston, a house of historic and architectural interest, built about 1723, used to be one of the showplaces of the West Country.

Lord Henderson, replying, said the house was occupied as a residence until 1937, when it was bought by the trustees of the Bristol Municipal Charities for use as a school.

### USED BY SERVICES— SOME DAMAGE

Plans were considered to make sure the fine character of the Vanbrugh house was preserved. Alterations involved demolition of the kitchen wing, which was not designed by Vanbrugh, and an addition was planned to be in keeping with the rest of the house.

The house was requisitioned for Service purposes during the war, but was likely to be derequisitioned shortly. There had been a certain amount of damage, but the main fabric was intact. The house would be repaired soon.

"I suggest that as a matter of principle it is better that these old distinguished houses should continue to serve some public purpose rather than lie idle as empty shells," Lord Henderson said.

### GOVERNMENT'S AIM

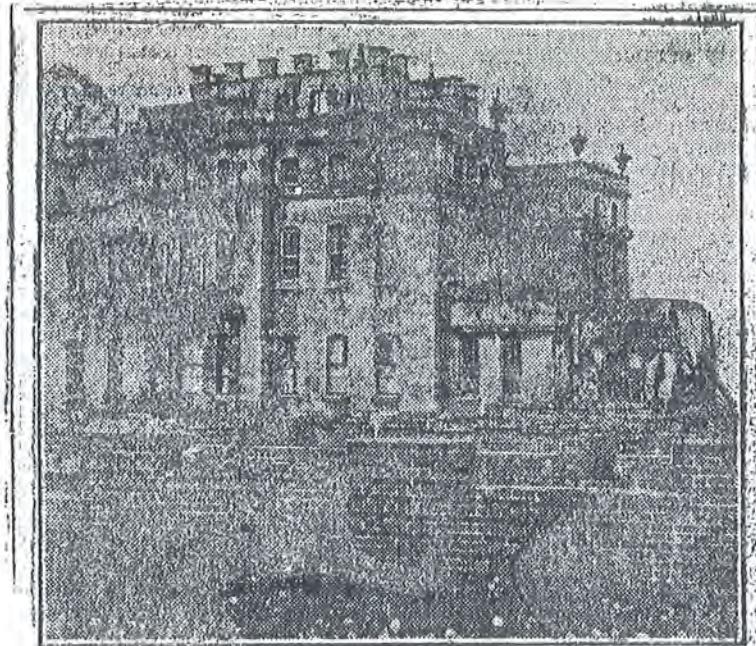
"There is no better way of keeping a house in good condition than by its being lived in, and that will be the case with Kings Weston when the school can return."

The trustees would replace the fireplaces as far as possible in their earlier positions.

It might be accepted that Kings Weston would be listed by the local planning authority, or by the Minister under Section 42 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1946, and if at any time a preservation order should be necessary, it would be issued.

The Government's aim was to ensure that beautiful old houses should be preserved from possible decay, neglect or damage, by ill-considered action.

(The house was purchased for eventual occupation by Queen Elizabeth's Hospital, the Bristol City School.)



KING'S WESTON HOUSE.—View from South side showing where work on proposed school dormitories was commenced prior to the last war.

(Q.E.H. Has Ambitious Plans, But . . .

## KING'S WESTON MUST WAIT

Although King's Weston House, Bristol, one of the showplaces of the West will—as Lord Methuen was assured on behalf of the Govt, in the House of Lords—be preserved, it is likely to be a long time before the materialisation of plans which the trustees have for its future.

SOON after the famous building, designed by Vanbrugh, was acquired by Bristol Municipal Charities in 1937 to house Queen Elizabeth's Hospital, an eminent firm of architects prepared plans for demolition of the kitchen wing, which was not considered in keeping with the rest of the premises, and for certain extensions which it was felt would preserve the notable architectural features of the house.

Work had begun when war broke out. Immediately the premises were requisitioned, and they served throughout the war as an embarkation centre for troops, with the result that some damage occurred, although in general the fabric of the building is intact.

The house has now been derequisitioned, but most of the grounds are still held by a Govt. dept., and numerous Nissen huts are erected on them.

It was stated today that the trustees were anxious to complete their plans for the building as soon as possible, and to move Q.E.H. there from the present premises in Brandon Hill; but in view of present-day restrictions it was unlikely that work would be possible for some time.

### Temporary Use

Apart from the fact that a licence for the work would not be obtainable, the cost would now be about three times what had originally been estimated.

Every effort was being made to prevent further deterioration in the building, and a claim had been made in respect of the damage. It was possible that the building might be put to some temporary use until Q.E.H. could move.

It is planned that the grounds shall provide playing field facilities now lacking at Brandon Hill.

King's Weston is to contain one of the new housing estates, but the house is on the list of buildings to be preserved.

The grounds are cluttered up with several unfinished brick structures and blocks of masonry, outward signs of what were intended to be dormitories and other out-buildings for the school and whose building was abandoned when the house was taken over by the Services.

The northern end of the house is partly demolished and shore up again, due to the interruption of work preparatory to the school's moving-in.

### Kingsweston House

THE statement in the House of Lords on Thursday that Kingsweston House was to be preserved will give much satisfaction to Bristolians and to people everywhere who have regard for our stately homes of the past.

Lord Methuen, who raised the question, said the mansion was built in 1723—he meant the present mansion, of course. This was about the date of Goldney House, and several other big mansions in and near Clifton.

The merchant kings of Bristol opulent from lucrative shares in privateering enterprises and the slave trade, had plenty of money to lavish on their homes, and some of them remain memorials to Bristol's greatest era of prosperity.

### Of Ancient Origin

The manor of Kingsweston is an ancient foundation. It was granted to Robert Fitzhardinge, ancestor of the Berkeley family, by Henry II.

This family parted with the property in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and towards the close of the 17th century it came into the possession of Sir Robert Southwell.

His son Edward had the Tudor mansion rebuilt by Sir John Vanburgh, and it has remained little changed in the massive and impressive condition familiar to many generations of Bristolians.

### Hospitality Indeed

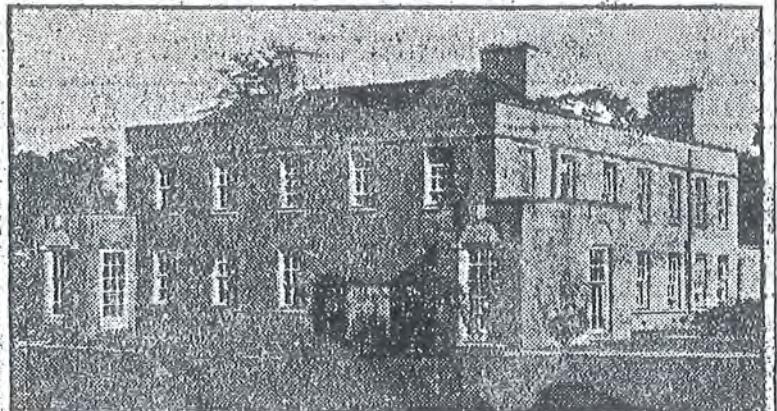
The Southwell family appear to have had great wealth, for no expense was spared in making their home a notable show-place.

The lay-out of the grounds had fame far and wide, and during the period of Beau Nash's social reign in Bath few visitors of consequence were allowed to depart without a journey to Bristol to view the gardens at Kingsweston.

In 1688 King William was entertained at Kingsweston on his way from Torbay to London; but the most famous time of hospitality at this old mansion was in 1739, when Edward Southwell was a candidate for Parliament.

The "Gloucester Journal" made this reference to it: "The hon. Mr Southwell has kept open house at Shirehampton . . . There are constantly employed a baker, a butcher and two brewers to provide for the reception of all comers."

## "The House in the Gardens"



KNOWN as "The House in the Gardens," this modern residence, home of the late Mrs Napier Miles, on the King's Weston estate, is to be sold, together with garages and stabling, involving about 16 acres in all. Built in 1937, within the walled garden of the old King's Weston House, to the design of a leading firm of London architects, "The House in the Gardens" is "modern" in every appointment, and occupies one of the most picturesque sites in the Bristol district. Noted features of it is the lily pond and fishpool, familiar to those who know the beauty of the walk through King's Weston Park. The sale will be conducted by Messrs John E. Fritchard and Co., of Queen's Road, Clifton, at the Grand Hotel, on Thursday, October 28 unless negotiations are concluded privately in the meantime.

WESTERN DAILY PRESS AND BRISTOL MIRROR,

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 1948

# THE WESTERN DAILY PRESS AND BRISTOL MIRROR.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 29, 1956

## Little-known corner of Kings Weston

THE large walled garden, with its fruit trees trained on high walls, its lawns, flowers and shrubs (and discreetly hidden kitchen gardens) was once the delight of the rich.

It is now the delight of only the very rich, and it is because I remembered the House in the Garden, Kings Weston, Bristol, had a particularly fine walled old English garden when purchased by the Corporation in 1948 that I called in yesterday to see how it was doing.

## Nine acres

The house lies off Kings Weston Road, not far from Blaise Castle, and is now a school for backward girls. If you wandered in and looked round the nine acres of grounds you would never guess it. They are more like a wealthy man's pride.

I was told they are attracting a good number of visitors, some from overseas.

## Fig trees

The house was built as recently as 1937, but it stands in what were once the gardens of Vanbrugh's, Kings Weston House. This is also a school now. The gardens were laid out by John Milne in 1776, and although walled gardens are not rare in this part of England, these are particularly fine.

One section, the "secluded garden," has a very rare feature, a wall bearing trained fig trees. These, like many of the other fruit trees in the gardens, are more than 100 years old and are still in excellent condition.

Another wall supports more than 20 plum, pear and apricot trees, and is claimed to be the best trained fruit wall in the West. Elsewhere there are apple, peach, gage and cherry trees.

## Mobile unit

In the old days, I was told, these gardens would probably have been tended by a head gardener and about four under gardeners. The cost of this today would be about £2,500 per annum. Instead, the gardens are now maintained by one "garden handyman" and an Education Committee mobile unit which looks after all the committee's grounds from Filton to Avonmouth. This cuts the cost considerably.

All the fruit and vegetables grown at the House in the Garden are sent to Corporation school kitchens. About 25,000 plants are also grown each year for school gardens—and 500 young Christmas trees will be lifted from the nursery there to help this year's school festivities.

## The Bewis Stone

Moorhens breed on the large lilypond and nearby stands a stone column, the Bewis Stone. This once stood at Avonmouth and sailors were reputed to say their last prayers there for a safe voyage before sailing. There is a worn hole in the base of the monument where offerings were dropped—and another hole below where the priests were said to have put their hands to get the offerings out again.

The "secluded garden" next to the lilypond was once completely secluded. Creepers were trained down over the arched entrance gateway in the 14-ft. wall into a curtain, so that the ladies who sat in the garden did so in absolute seclusion.

Gardens were then really gardens.

ONCE A HOME SET in fine Old English gardens, the House in the Garden at Kings Weston, not far from Blaise Castle, is now a school for backward girls. Its gardens (first laid out in 1776) are still fine, as these pictures show (See Notes of the Day). TOP LEFT: Reflected in the tranquil lily pond is a house that was probably first built for a groom at Kings Weston House.

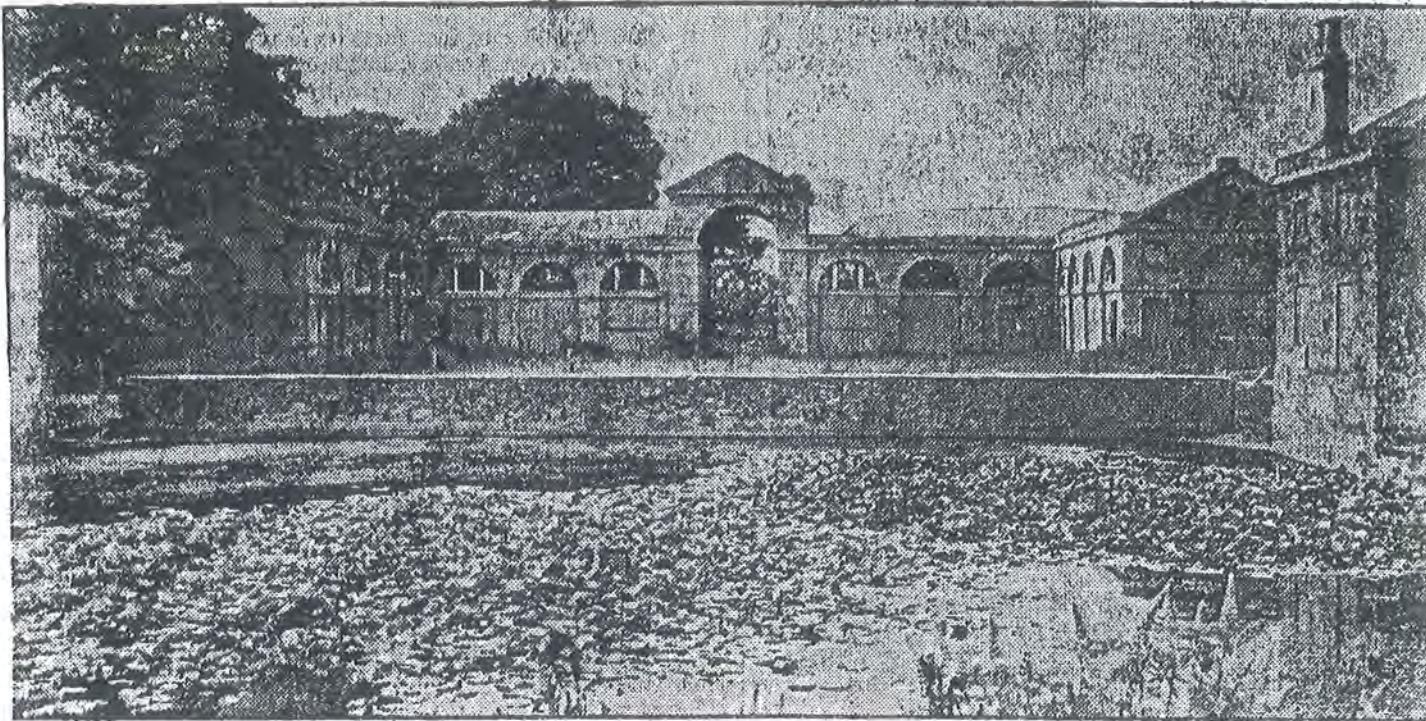
TOP RIGHT: A view of the "House in the Garden" itself. RIGHT CENTRE: Plums, apricots and pears grow in abundance on this wall. Mr. E. Lloyd, area foreman of the Education Committee's grounds and gardens, inspects the fruit.

BOTTOM LEFT: The ageless charm of an old-world garden is captured in this view down a pathway which leads past the Bewis Stone and lily pond to the walled "secluded garden."

BOTTOM CENTRE: From the house there is a view across the walled gardens with their fruit trees, roses, shrubs and herbaceous borders, to Kings Weston House beyond.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Through one archway there is a view of the Vanbrugh-period stables of Kings Weston House, and in the foreground, the Bewis Stone, which once stood at Avonmouth.

# PLANNERS' MOVE PROMPTS QUESTION IS KING'S WESTON HOUSE DOOMED?



THE 18TH CENTURY STABLES designed by Sir John Vanbrugh, at King's Weston, which are to be demolished—apart from the facade—as seen as possible. This view shows the caved-in roof just to the right of the central gateway.

THE proposed demolition of the 18th century stables at King's Weston—decided by Bristol Planning and Public Works Committee yesterday—may be a pointer to the fate of the house itself, Mr. Reece Winstone, a member of the Council for the Preservation of Ancient Bristol, said today.

The committee decided that the stables should be demolished as soon as possible, with the exception of the facade.

A member of the Architects Forum said: "The council have probably brought this thing to a head in their usual way, by allowing the building to get to a state where it is unusable."

"Now we are faced with the same sort of thing as happened to Penpole Lodge, which was in such a state it simply had to be pulled down."

## MUSEUM?

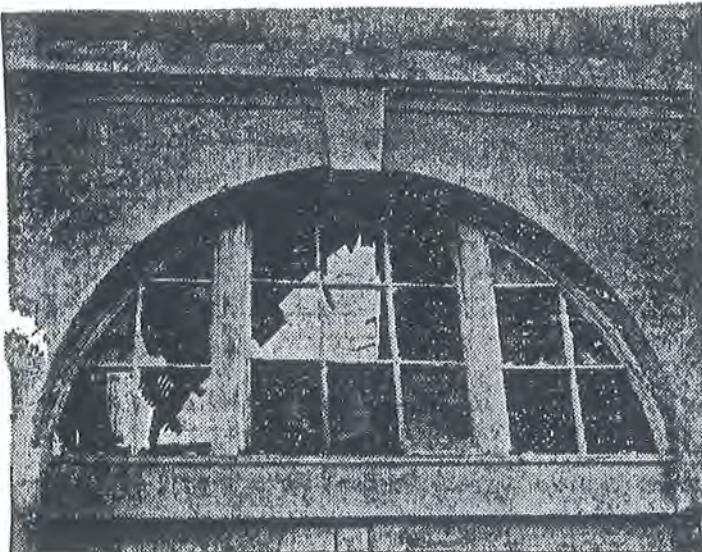
"Almost certainly with intelligent use the building could be saved. One thought we had was that it might become a museum for the city coaches, or a museum for vintage cars."

"The stables are particularly attractive in their setting—a very simple building which it would be a shame to pull down."

Mr. Winstone said the fate of the stables was tied up with the future of King's Weston house.

"In recent years," he went on, "the possible future of King's Weston house itself has been under a cloud. Nothing serious has happened yet, but nothing very much is being done there in the way of preservation and it seems that the house may follow the fate of the stables."

The house was at present being used as a school, but a new school would be built and what would happen then, he asked.



BROKEN WINDOWS and caved-in roof of the 18th century stables at King's Weston, which are to be demolished.

## **IN DOUBT**

Mr. Winstone added that he deplored the decision to demolish the stables, adding: "If the City council thought anything about their ancient buildings, there would be a plan for the house. But they haven't a plan. And, as the years go by there will not be any money to save King's Weston house. Its future is in doubt."

For the Bristol Civic Society, Mr. Oliver Perkins, commenting on the committee's decision, said that he did not think the society had any official view on the matter.

The stables he said were lost and it was too late to do anything now. "I see they are going to save the facade and I think that is the best that can be done."

King's Weston house was designed by Sir John Vanbrugh—he was also responsible for Blenheim Palace, birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill—in the early 18th century. The walls were up in 1713 but not the roof and work on the house and smaller buildings around continued until after 1725. The stables, to the east of the house, were added in 1763 by architect Robert Mylne.

This is not the first time King's Weston has been the centre of controversy.

Questions were asked in the House of Lords in 1947 when Lord Methuen urged the Government to consider scheduling the house as an ancient monument. King's Weston house, he said, used to be one of the show places of the West Country.

### **PLANS, BUT . . .**

Lord Henderson, who replied for the Government, said plans were considered to make sure the fine character of the house was preserved. He suggested that as a matter of principle it was better that "these old distinguished houses should continue to serve some public purpose rather than lie idle as empty shells."

Later that year Bristol Health Committee decided to take no further action on a proposal that the house should be converted into a residential nursery. It had been offered to the committee by the Trustees of Bristol Municipal Charities for not less than 10 years and possibly for 15 years.

The house, with its extensive views over the Severn Estuary, although well over 200 years old, was not the first to be built there, for it took the place of a much older building. It was probably planned by Sir Robert Southwell, but he died in 1702 and the building was carried out for his son, Edward.

# NOT TO WORRY, SIR JOHN, THE CHIMNEYS

*Detail from the fireplace.*

A wonderful old stately home in Bristol is coming back to life again. King's Weston, brainchild of Vanbrugh, was a celebrated house in its 18th-century heyday.

Now it is staging a come-back. It will be the administrative hub of Bristol's new £4 million College of Science and Technology. And although multi-storey blocks of twentieth century buildings will be grouped around it, Kings Weston will easily hold its own. It should stand tall like a bright jewel of period architecture. Set aside austere modern styles, Vanbrugh's famous house will still compel attention.

Once a Tudor house stood on this delectable plateau commanding a vista of the Bristol Channel and the distant Welsh hills. It was set out with magnificent formal gardens. The trim avenues run north and south stretching as far as Penpole Munt.

## Imagination

Alderman Humphrey Hook, Bristol, the owner, bequeathed Kings Weston to his son. His son sold it to Robert Southwell in 179,

It is to the imagination and ride in Kings Weston of Sir Robert's son, Edward, that we owe the house as we know today. Sir Edward was chief Secretary for Ireland to his father before him and member for Rye in 1707.

He looked round his inheritance and decided that such superlative setting deserved better house. For his architect he went to the very cream of the profession. He commissioned Sir John Vanbrugh to draw up designs for a new house on the site of the old.

## Characteristic

Vanbrugh had his hands full at the time. He was engaged in building that gigantic pile of an English place, Blenheim. Castle Howard also engaged his attention.

But Vanbrugh, delighted with his opportunities on this

lovely West country upland, found time to spare for Kings Weston. The outline of the house bears all his characteristic hallmarks, although he did not live to see it completed.

Certainly no other architect could have designed Kings Weston's celebrated arcade of chimneys. For while other designers did their best to conceal their chimneys, Vanbrugh built big and bold. His chimneys are the work of a master builder of chimneys. Like his rooftop urns they are a last triumphant gesture to the sky.

Southwell placed as much importance on the chimneys as his architects. But probably for a different reason. Some of Vanbrugh's fine chimneys were so high, wide and handsome they could cause draughts.

## Their creation

So Southwell wrote a letter to Vanbrugh. The letter is still preserved in Bristol.

"In my last letter," he wrote, "I told you I wished you would not go up with the chimneys till I was with you on the spot to make trial of the heights etc., with boards.

"I am glad to find you now of the same opinion . . . for I would fain have that part rightly hit off."

We can imagine the scene of architect and owner clambering about the leads of their splendid creation measuring with boards the exact height of the famous arcade.

Just how well they "hit it off" has been admired by

posterity down through the generations.

When Vanbrugh died, it was left to Robert Mylne, another architect, to finish the work. Mylne and another Edward Southwell, Sir Edward's grandson, finished the house and laid out the grounds in a way that followed the Vanbrugh blueprint religiously.

## Q.E.H. proposal

The Southwells sold their home to Philip John Miles, of Leigh Court, in 1832. It passed to a Phillip Skinner Miles who married Pamela, the daughter of General Sir William Napier. The Napier Miles family held Kings Weston until 1937. Then it ended its history as a private house and was acquired by the Bristol Museum and Art Galleries.

They proposed to move Queen Elizabeth's Hospital school to Kings Weston. Work began and the XIX century kitchens were demolished and building work began in the gardens.

Fate in the shape of World War II intervened. Work was suspended and the old house fell silent. Then it was re-opened for the occupation of troops. Period fireplaces were stored for safety in the basement.

Kings Weston did not come unscathed through the war. Soldiers cannot be expected to appreciate the finer points of 18th century domestic architecture.

## Adventures

But the adventures of Kings Weston were not over yet. It was leased to Bristol Education committee as a primary school. Five hundred daily pupils trod a muddy track across the long for-

gotten formal gardens from the council houses of Lawrence Weston estate to the great house.

Just to be on the safe side, the handsome hanging staircase in the hall was given a metal prop. This staircase is a superb piece of carpentry. It was left hanging in the air supported only at its angles by four great piers. But before the pupils climbed it, the prop and new metal guard rails were introduced.

## Undress

The grisaille paintings representing Greek statues and urns were discreetly hidden in their hall niches. The marble relief of cherubs set by Devall above his central fireplace was also boarded up.

After all the cherubs and some of the statues were in a state of undress and hardly conducive to concentration on school lessons!

Now they are back on show again, giving colour and atmosphere to a famous house. Already the main salon is starting to look much as it did when the Southwells entertained here.

It is a room of dramatic height. You step into it directly from the entrance steps of Vanbrugh's engaging portico of Corinthian pilasters

## Horn motif

Into the walls are built a series of decorated plaster frames to hold the Southwell's Tulcan and Rockingham portraits.

There is a motif of hunting horns clustered round a spread of elk horns. The original brass chandelier had proved too heavy to rehang but a suitable successor is being found.

If ever the ghost of John

Vanbrugh revisits the scene of his West Country triumph, he may tut-tut if he looks up. For his famous arcade of chimneys is missing.

Don't worry, Sir John! Your chimneys are going back. They have been dismantled

and lowered to the ground because wear and tear of decades of weather has made them dangerous. But the newest inheritors of your fine house are jealous of its good looks and intend replacing them as soon as possible!

# 18th-century mansion to get new life

Bristol's College of Science and Technology will bring new life to the 18th-century mansion of Kings Weston.

This was designed in 1710 by Vanbrugh, who also created Blenheim. It is one of the smallest buildings on which he was ever engaged, but is characteristic of his work.

Despite its use as a hospital during the First World War, and a troop embarkation centre during the Second, the house has kept most of its original glory.

#### SPACE AND GRANDEUR

The fabric is sound, and although the lower floors are now being used as a primary school, the clutter of desks and cupboards can do little to disguise the space and grandeur of the rooms.

The destiny of the fine old house has been clouded since before the outbreak of the last war. Bought by Bristol Municipal Charities in 1937, work was started to convert it for school use by Queen Elizabeth's Hospital.

Then came the war, and the building's requisition. In 1947 Lord Methuen, in the Lords, asked the Government to consider scheduling it as an ancient monument.

Later the same year Bristol's Health Committee turned down a plan to use the house as a residential nursery.

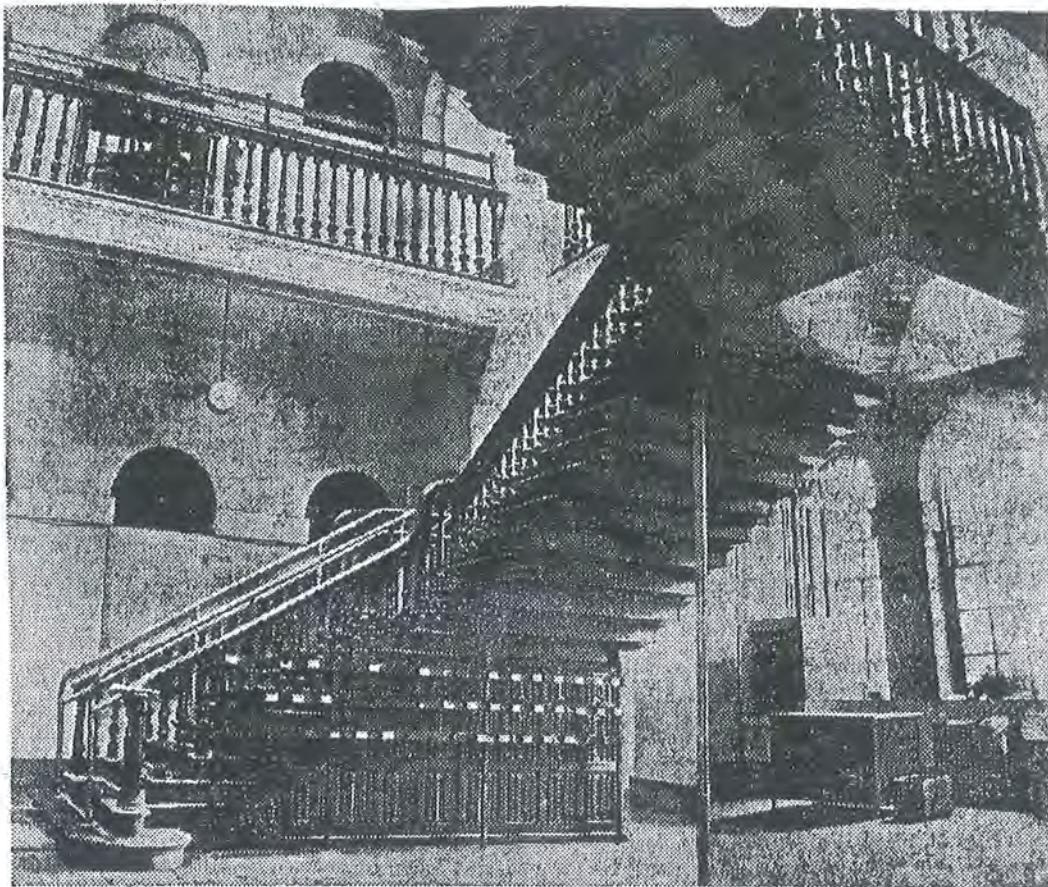
#### FAVOURABLE

The reaction towards the probable fate of Kings Weston seems generally favourable.

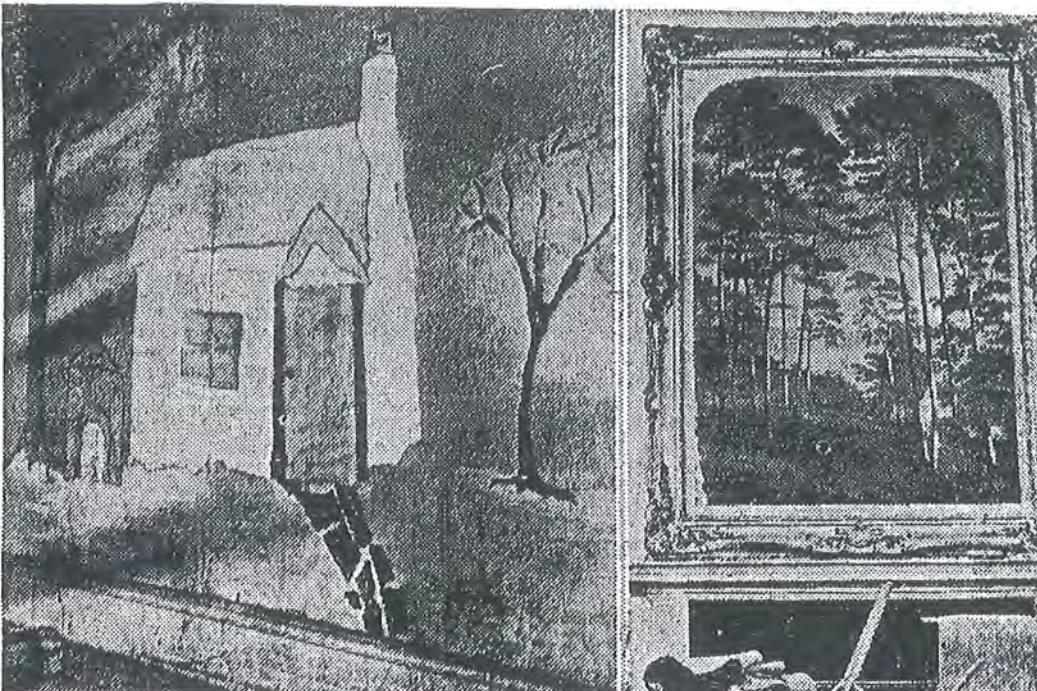
"It looks as though it might be a solution to the problem—it depends upon the architectural interpretation of the whole scheme," was the cautious comment from a Bristol Civic Society member.

The scheme will be welcomed by the people of Lawrence Weston, Cllr. James O'Neill, city councillor for Avon Ward, in which the new college will be erected, told the Evening Post today.

"Members of Lawrence Weston Community Council will be delighted at the news, as being some measure of reward for their efforts over several years to improve the area," he said.



THE GREAT STAIRWAY which is one of the most striking features of Kings Weston House.



THE LITTLE SCENE on left was painted by a child direct on to the wallpaper in one of the upper rooms. Picture on right is in a small room on the ground floor, and is the only one remaining of the many beautiful oil paintings which once graced the house.

# These outbuildings are historic, says architect

by ROGER BENNETT

Detective work by a Bristol architect led today to an urgent appeal to Bristol Corporation to prevent the demolition of outbuildings at Kings Weston House.

Mr. Michael Jenner says he can prove that three of the four ruined buildings are the work of the great architect Vanburgh.

One of the three, says Mr. Jenner, is probably of world importance as the first example of the Romantic movement.

The fourth, buried in a tangle of bushes, was probably the most sophisticated building in the Bristol area at the beginning of the 18th century.

## DEMOLITION

In the light of Mr. Jenner's discoveries, the Bristol and Somerset Society of Architects announced today that they will press Bristol Corporation to reject Bath University's demolition application.

The University are about to vacate the Vanburgh mansion at Kingsweston, which they have used for the past seven years as their department of architecture.

Some £40,000 has been spent on restoration work, but the outbuildings in the grounds were not touched.

The University say they are now dangerous and should be demolished.

## CAMPAIGN

The Corporation have received 38 objections from various bodies and individuals.

The campaign has now been joined by the city's architects, who say that demolition would be a major tragedy in the light of Mr. Jenner's discoveries.

The four buildings concerned are a 1707 Banqueting House, a 1718-19 loggia known as The Laundry, the

## 'Stop the demolition' appeal to planners

1717 Echo, and the 1715 Brewhouse.

And this is what Mr. Jenner says about them:

The Banqueting House: "It is hidden in the bushes, and the roof is in a state of collapse."

"But it has the most beautiful brickwork I have ever seen, and was probably the most sophisticated building in Bristol at the time. It was one of the first brick-built buildings in the area."

The laundry: "A drawing from Vanburgh's office survives, proving conclusively that it is by Vanburgh."

## ARCHWAY

The Echo: "No drawings survive. But there is a Vanburgh drawing of an archway for another site which is absolutely identical."

"There is no doubt at all that The Echo is also by Vanburgh."

The Brewhouse: "This has been wrongly attributed to a Mr. Price of Wandsworth, who did some work at Kingsweston."

"But this is nothing like his rustic style. It is extremely sophisticated and completely in Vanburgh's style."

"In addition, it has decorative stonework in the Mediaeval style, called machicolation, the overhanging bit you get on castles for people to pour boiling oil on their enemies."

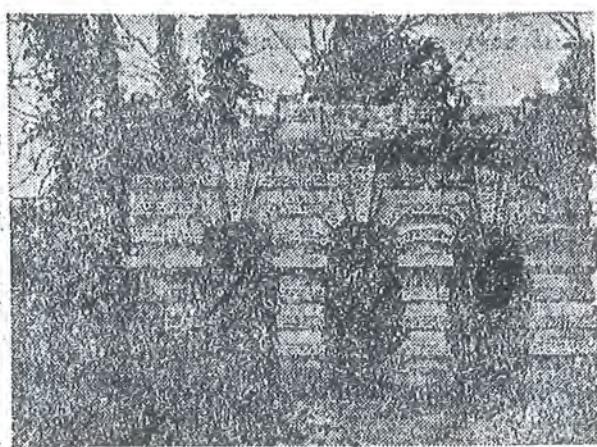
"Vanburgh became very

The Echo: "Archway identical."

FOOTNOTE: Vanburgh spent two years in Bastille as an alleged spy; was also the leading Wright of his time, was self-taught architect.

His most famous buildings are Castle Howard and Blenheim.

He is usually reckoned England's second greatest architect after Wren, but so historians rate him Wren equal.



## OUTCRY

They will ask the Planning Committee to reject the University's demolition plans.

Mr. Jenner said: "We must not lose these buildings as we lost Tower Lodge at Pensford in 1950."

The disappearance of Tower Lodge caused an outcry; this time we must see that there is an outcry before it is too late."

The outbuildings are listed, and Ministry approval would be needed for demolition. But the city planners are understood to be sympathetic towards the protesters.

# *Call to demolish 'danger' buildings*

Three buildings in the grounds of Kings Weston House, which are said to be in danger of collapse, may be demolished.

Bath University of Technology, who own the house, are shortly to dispose of the premises and the grounds.

And they want to demolish the three buildings, called The Echo, The Brewery and The Laundry, which are in various stages of ruin.

But many societies object to the proposal, and individual protests total 38, including Lord Methuen and Prof. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner.

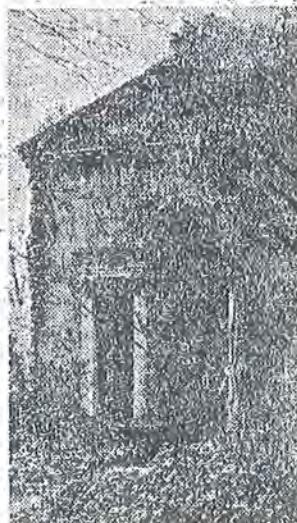
## **ON LIST**

Organisations urging preservation include Bristol Civic Society, Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, the Council for the Preservation of Ancient Bristol, the Ancient Monument Society and The Georgian Group.

The three buildings are on the Ministry of Housing's list of buildings worthy of preservation.

Since the demolition plan was advertised, there have been protest petitions from architects, other professional men and students.

The Ancient Monument Society say that apart from their intrinsic merits each building has a special relationship with Kings Weston House in style and position.



The Laundry today.

The Society would like to see them restored.

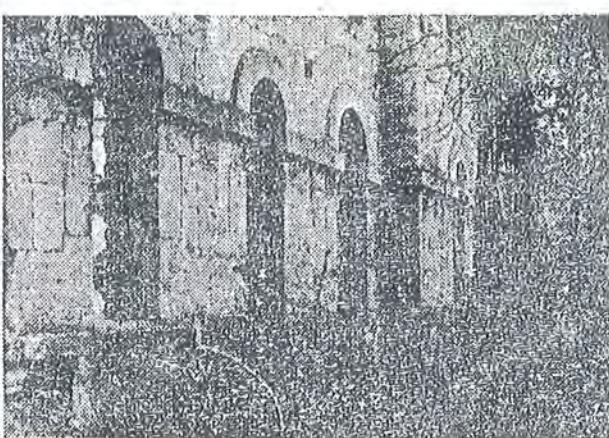
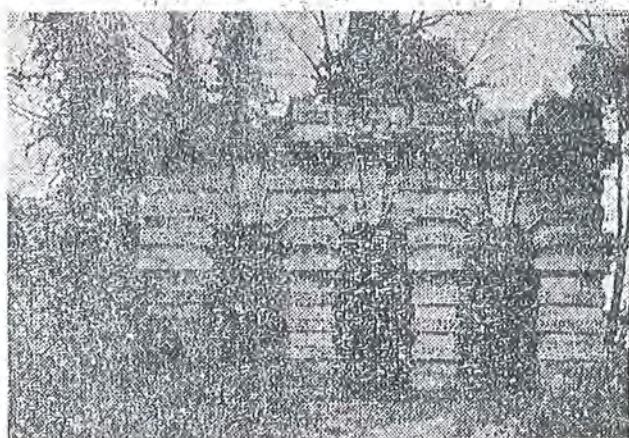
Bristol's Planning Committee were this afternoon asked to approve the demolition.

The engineer and surveyor of Bath University reported that the grounds were used by children as a playground and the buildings suffered frequent damage.

The Echo was in imminent danger of collapse, he said.

There was risk of serious injury to intruders, "and it is to remove this risk that we have submitted our application."

EVENING POST, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21 1970



Two of the buildings as they are today... The Echo (left) and The Brewery.

EVENING POST, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16 1970

# *Historic buildings are saved*

The outbuildings of Kings Weston House have been reprieved.

Bath University have withdrawn the demolition application made to Bristol Corporation last week.

The Corporation had received 38 objections from various bodies and organisations.

Mr. Gordon Horner, Registrar of Bath University, said today: "The estate is to be sold later this year, so we have decided to let the new owner decide what is to be done."

## DELIGHTED

Delighted with the news is Bristol architect Mr. Michael Jenner.

His work on the buildings showed that three of them were the work of the great architect Vanburgh.

The fourth was probably the most sophisticated building in the Bristol area at the beginning of the 18th century.

His main worry now is the dilapidated state of the buildings.

"Under the Civic Amenities Act, the University are obliged to improve them before they fall down.

"It will only involve a small amount of money," he added.

"Feeling is so strong that I am sure local people will watch with great interest what the new owner of the estate will do."

Ministry approval is needed for demolition.



Peter Floyd (left) and Charles Gregory carry in some of the decor for tonight's ball at King's Weston House.

## Potted palms and all at the ball

by ROGER BENNETT

Guests at tonight's masked ball at King's Weston House will be greeted by a scene to suit just about every taste.

Wildly abstract works of art by students of architecture will be dotted among 16 potted palms loaned by Bristol Corporation parks department.

And musically, the sounds will range from Avon Cities jazz to period music played by a consort of recorders on the magnificent staircase of the Vanburgh mansion.

A team of helpers led by hall-committee chairman Mr. Peter Floyd, a member of the City Planning Department, were scurrying about King's Weston today getting everything ready for the 350 guests who are paying four guineas a head for the plea-

### STAR

Mr. Martin Fisher has been up night after night with his team of electricians devising lighting effects which will be a star attraction.

Fifty spotlights, 30 stage lights and some cube-shaped lanterns will be dotted around inside the house.

And from the outside, King's Weston will be floodlit, providing a spectacle for drivers passing along the M.5.

Groups of helpers have devised different decorative schemes for the sitting-out rooms on the ground and first floors.

One has been transformed into a leafy bower, filled with borrowed rhododendrons, ivy and laburnum. Others have been draped in fabric to give a tent-like effect.

### LIMB

Mr. Floyd, organising the ball for the Bristol and Somerset Society of Architects, tells me that it has been touch-and-go to prepare the mansion in the two months since the decision to abandon the Restoration Ball at Ashton Court.

"But we'll be all right on the night," he said.

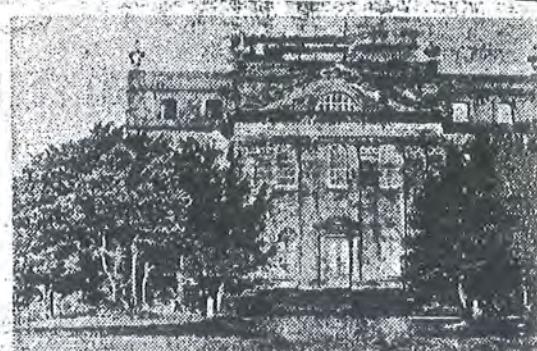
Masks will be judged at midnight, soup and rolls will be served to those in need of sustenance at 1.30 a.m., and Morris Dancers will be performing on the lawns during the evening.

The ball more or less coincides with the departure from King's Weston of the Bath University department of architecture.

Professor Ken Panter said: "I'm sad to leave, but it will be better for the students to move to Bath. We've been out on a limb here."

The architects are hoping the ball will stimulate interest in the future of King's Weston.

There are awful fears that if nobody takes it over it could like Ashton Court, crumble once more into a state of decay.



## Kingsweston House 'safe'

The future of Kingsweston House, the architectural gem at Lawrence Weston, is safe, Ald. Gervas Walker said this afternoon.

There are busy behind-the-scenes negotiations about the fate of the 18th century mansion now that Bath University are relinquishing it as the home of their School of Architecture.

They are putting it under the auctioneer's hammer, but Ald. Walker, leader of the City Council tells me:

"One thing is certain: the house will be retained and the Corporation are quite adamant on that point."

"But it is too early to comment on its future use; it will depend to some degree on the attitude of Bath University."

The Corporation snatched the house from the jaws of death, it was said, two years ago when they secured it for what was originally planned as a hub for the Bristol College of Science and Technology.

Subsequently £40,000 was spent by Bath University on restoration.

### THE FEARS

Typical of the fearful reactions is that of Cllr. Jim O'Neil (Lab, Avon), who has written to the Town Clerk asking for assurances.

A few months ago he called attention to the vandalism at the outbuildings and the dumping of old wrecked cars in the grounds.

Afterwards the University withdrew plans to demolish three outbuildings, stated to have considerable historic interest.

The Civic Society are keenly interested in the outcome.

Their secretary, Mr. Christopher Marsden-Bridley, said this afternoon: "This is, after all, one of the

very few Vanburgh's in the country and its treasures of Bristol."

"We must look at or find someone who

Ideas for its proposed use by the Civic Society included a picture library though this had great advantages — as a music college or as a multi-purpose centre.

## 'Save Kings Weston land too'

A plea for retention of the grounds around Kings Weston House, Bristol, came today from Cllr. Jim O'Neill.

The Avon councillor welcomed very much the assurances given yesterday by Ald. Gervas Walker that the historic house would be retained.

"But I am still apprehensive because he omits to say

anything about the grounds.

"I am extremely concerned that there should be no building on this open site, which is a wonderful setting for the house itself."

"If there were any question of building being allowed, this would detract from the value of the house."

## Kings Weston House

Reading your article regarding the future of Kings Weston House, I recall in memory, a July evening many years ago.

The beautiful music room was filled with an invited audience of enthusiasts, listening spellbound to the musical brilliance of the Goossen's family. The host, Sir Napier Miles, a patron of the arts, particularly music.

Surely this is the answer — a home for a famous orchestra. The walls would re-echo past glories and Bristol be proud of her cultural heritage.

Marion Short.

Heath Cottage, Coalpit Heath, near Bristol.

Sir,—We are greatly concerned about the future of King's Weston, which is about to become vacant, and which will be in danger again if a suitable use is not found for it. The house is one of Vanbrugh's most important works, a number of the garden buildings are also by him, and it would be an appalling loss if the house should become derelict, the garden buildings already in decay be allowed to disappear, and the park be developed for housing, all three definite possibilities.

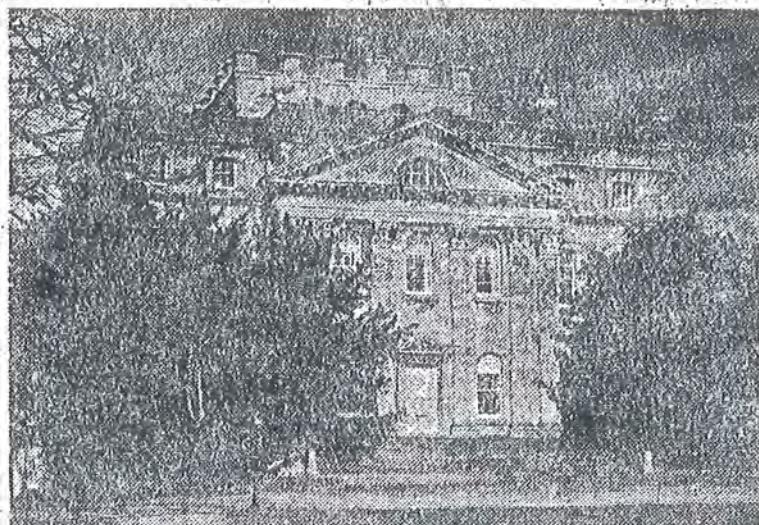
The place, which belongs to Bath University, has been a problem for many years, but it seemed safe when the university's Department of Architecture was established there in 1961. However, this department is about to move to a site on the new campus at Bath. The fine stable block which was threatened with demolition in 1957 was converted

with great imagination into a station in 1962.

We hope that some body may f the example of the university an the house and grounds. Recent attempts to find a use have p fruitless, but we feel that wider publicity may attract the attention educational trust, a commercial pise or private benefactor lookin a grand and dramatically sited on the edge of a big city. It is opportunity, but equally the p alternative of decay and eventual lition would be the most seriou of its kind for many years.

Yours faithfully,  
I. O. CHANCE, Cha  
Georgian Group.  
BUSTON, Chairman, Socie  
the Protection of Ancient  
Buildings.

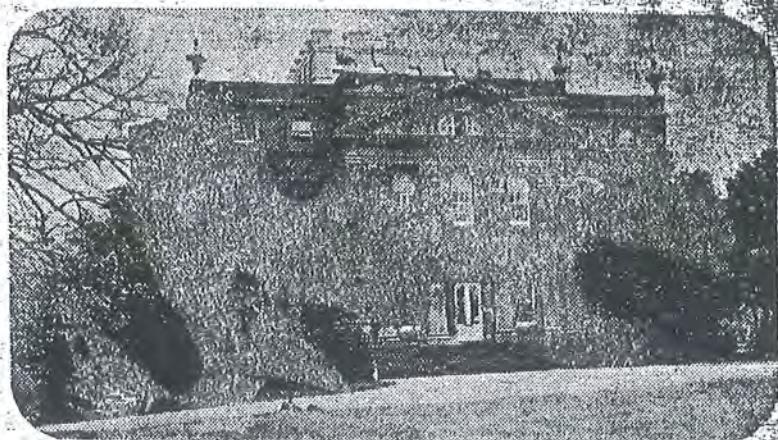
NIKOLAUS PEVSNER,  
BRYAN LITTLE, Cha  
Bristol Civic Society  
June 29.



# Saved!

## A fine

### old Bristol mansion...



Kingsweston House, which is getting new life as a police training centre.

HERE IS GOOD news for all who like me care for Bristol's heritage of stately homes.

After vicissitudes which surely would have put lesser houses on the scrap-heap, Kingsweston House looks safe at last for posterity.

A few weeks ago the new tenants moved into Vanbrugh's fine mansion. They were — the police. For the house has started

a new lease of life as Bristol Constabulary central training school.

Over the years I have watched what I dreaded might be the decline and fall of one of Bristol's most interesting houses. I saw it an empty echoing ghost of a house after the troops moved out after World War II.

I returned to watch long files of primary schoolchildren in muddy

Wellingtons climb the front steps. Inside the splendid hanging staircase, one of the marvels of Kingsweston, had ugly safety rails and a metal prop in case the weight of so many schoolchildren proved too much.

Excellent restoration work to the chimney arcades and other features was accomplished by the next tenants — Bath University's School of Architecture.

But their stay was of necessity only temporary and the final fate of the house still hung in the balance.

#### Views gone

Now I have been back again to see that hanging staircase restored to its old good looks. From its magnificent chimney arcade to its colourful Morish tiles in the basement Kingsweston House faces the future confidently in new and loving hands.

Of course there are some features whose restoration is beyond even the ambitions of the new tenants. Gone for good is that lovely little Breakfast Lodge on Penpole Point.

Although the spacious lawn in front of the house is again level and trim, much of the 37 acres of grounds need attention.

And that wonderful panorama over the Bristol Channel to the Welsh hills beyond that attracted the Southwell family to this situation to build their mansion two centuries ago, is now marred by factory stacks.

But for Chief Insp. Alan Hayden, commandant of the school, the move from the noise of city traffic of New Bridewell to the peace of Kingsweston is a boon.

#### Portraits

Here in quiet classrooms I saw a class of 20 policemen from all parts of the South-West and Wales training to become detectives.

For Kingsweston is now on the country's police map as one of five regional training centres for detectives.

The care and attention they are lavishing on their new acquisition makes it apparent that the Bristol police are aware of their responsibilities as guardians of a fine house.

I was told that the Chief Constable, Mr. George Twist, and the City Architect are optimistic about securing the return of a fine collection of paintings to their rightful place on the high wall of the saloon in the entrance front.

#### Vandals

This series of Tudor and Rockingham portraits were inherited by the Southwells and the architect Mylne, who took over the design of the house when Vanburgh died, remodelled the saloon to accommodate them.

The saloon is a room of fine proportions (some 30 feet high). Surely it deserves a crystal drop chandelier in place of that

# Every effort to preserve house

I read the account of the meeting held on Tuesday to consider the Planning Application for Kingsweston House with interest. I would like to comment on one remark apparently made by Cllr Crowley and in fact I had already been committed to a previous engagement some months ago and could not have been present at that meeting.

I did mention to several people that it did not appear appropriate for me to be present to listen to objections being made by people who had apparently already decided to oppose any sort of development at Kingsweston House.

I had arranged for the Architect to be present so that he could not only answer any questions which were raised but could also report back to the police authority on any reasonable suggestions or points which might arise at the meeting.

## Rejected

I would also point out that I had attempted, with the approval of the Police Authority, to set up a meeting with various councillors including the chairman of the Planning Committee and the leader of the Labour group in an attempt to be helpful and constructive and to explain and discuss our proposals but our invitation was rejected by the Planning Committee and the Authority were informed that no meeting could take place until the Planning Application had been submitted.

I would suggest that Cllr Crowley should contact the Labour members of the Bristol City council who presumably made

this decision. We have made available as much information as possible about the proposals and have had consultations with recognised conservation groups and the Royal Fine Art's commission all of whom have given favourable reactions.

The maximum publicity has been given to the Planning Application and the proposals through the good offices of the press, television and radio.

## Improve

I think that all the points which have been raised by interested parties have been dealt with in the Planning Application and supporting documents.

Every effort has been made to preserve and indeed improve Kingsweston House and the views of its since we are very conscious of the fact that it is one of the most important listed buildings in the country.

There should be in addition, a very considerable improvement from the present traffic flow in Kingsweston Lane since the proposal is to re-open the original drive and most of the traffic would be using Portway and not coming through Shirehampton Village.

I am quite sure that the vast majority of people will welcome the proposals which will ensure the preservation of this very fine building for the citizens of Bristol.

Ian Crawford  
Avon and Somerset Police  
Authority  
3, Downfield Road,  
Clifton, Bristol 8.

Evening Post, January 16th, 1978.

# Kingsweston

## House-

# the battle hots up

THE BATTLE over the plan to turn historic Kingsweston House into a multi-million pound headquarters for Avon and Somerset police reaches a crucial stage this week.

Champions and opponents of the controversial scheme will have their say at a public meeting called by the city planners on Thursday evening at Portway Lower School, Shirehampton. What happens at this meeting is likely to influence the ruling on the plan pronounced later by the planners.

The two camps are so widely divided that any compromise seems impossible.

### Blessing

On the one hand the Police Authority say that Kingsweston House with its 37 acres of grounds is the best possible site to build a headquarters for personnel badly overcrowded at Bridewell in the city. They say they have taken great pains to ensure that the development is sensitive and does not clash with its historic setting. They claim that because of their excellent record as guardians of Vanbrugh's magnificent house for the last six years, they have established the right to continue to be responsible for it.

MAX BARNES looks at the fight over the fate of a fine old Bristol building.

Critics of the scheme say that Kingsweston House is the wrong place for it. They claim that it is too intensive a development near a historic house. They complain about the position of the main HQ block, and a 150 foot tall mast. They are concerned about the cutting down of trees and the closing of footpaths. They are anxious about the noise and risks of increased traffic on already crowded thoroughfares in the district.

### Stables

Cllr Ian Crawford, chairman of the Police Authority, tells me that the plan had received the blessing of the Royal Fine Arts and the Historic Buildings Councils, both of whom were consulted at an early stage because of the tremendous importance of the site.

When Bristol Watch committee purchased the property in 1971 for a police training school, they paid more than £300,000 for it. A fact not widely known is that it

was sold with outline planning permission for building 225 houses on the site, the basis on which the price was negotiated.

The Avon and Somerset police region straddled over an enormous area from Bathampton down to Exmoor, taking in places like Bath and Frome. Bristol in the middle of the area was the logical place for the headquarters and from the police point of view, Kingsweston, near both city and motorways, was the ideal site.

The basic plan was for an admin block, together with communications and motor patrol area. The training school would be built behind the old stables in Napier Miles road.

Concern about the noise of police cars roaring about at all hours were unfounded. Most of the cars would be those of senior officers travelling from Kingsweston to the motorways on tours of the region. There would be about 10 police cars daily coming in for maintenance work which would be done in an old quarry hidden by trees.

## Guess

Civilian personnel would use the Shirehampton Road entrance. A count had been done of traffic in Sea Mills and other busy points and it was found that the addition of traffic from Kingsweston would be barely noticeable.

"Some people ask why we don't buy an office block in the centre of the city," said Mr Crawford. "The short answer to that is that we already own Kingsweston House and would like to make use of it. It would be very expensive to take over offices in the city and convert them and to buy a six or seven acre site in an area like the city docks would cost a million before you start building."

He reckons that if approval is given for the Kingsweston plan it will be five to six years time before a start can be made. An estimate of the cost was difficult but his guess is three million pounds.

The attack on the plan is spearheaded by families in Kingsweston Lane, who face the prospect of the main office block rising not far from their houses. Like the folk who live in Kingsweston Court, the rank of attractively renovated period cottages occupied in the days of the Napier Miles, by the coachman, the gamekeeper, the forester, the gardener and the butler from the big house.

## Proposals

People like Mrs Sally Silcock, secretary of the newly formed Kingsweston Preservation Society and her neighbour, Mr Doug Johnson, retired clerk of works and Society chairman:

They find the police proposals unacceptable on almost every count. They say that if the main three-storey office block goes up just across Kingsweston Lane from their cottages, office staff would be able to look down into their bedrooms.

"We feel that the whole development is over intensive near a historic house," said Mrs Silcock. "We think the whole scale of the plan and the amount of traffic it would generate is quite unacceptable for this area."

Features they single out for special criticism are the 150 feet high radio mast, a target they say for terrorists. They are concerned about the disturbance of night operations and the flood lighting necessary for security.

## Splendid

They feel that the car park for 400 cars will generate a lot of noise in a locality well-known for its sound-board effects. They say that the development will cut a swathe in the woodland and are concerned about its effect on footpaths now used by the public.

They will be going to Thursday's public meeting armed with a petition with 4,000 signatures against the plan and say they will press for a pub-

lic inquiry and fight the scheme all the way.

Over the decades since the Napier Miles family lived in the style for which John Vanbrugh designed his splendid house, Kingsweston House has seen many vicissitudes. The next owners, Bristol Municipal Charities trustees, were converting it into a new home for QEH school when the Second World War interrupted them. For years the house languished unattended.

After the last war I watched hundreds of junior school children tramping up the front steps into their classes. The celebrated "flying" staircase had a metal prop. Then, when its fortunes were at a low ebb, the Department of Architecture moved in and began restoring its lost good looks. More recently under the responsible ownership of the police, Vanbrugh's fine house has continued to prosper.

## Lottery

"Now," says Mr Crawford, "The real million dollar question comes down to this — if the police have to leave Kingsweston, what happens to the most important small Vanbrugh house in the country?"

If Kingsweston House did come into the market it could command a price of half a million pounds. Opponents of the police plan say they are prepared to organise a lottery to buy the house and then let it to suitable tenants and help with the maintenance of the grounds themselves.

# Police shun historic gem

Last-ditch attempts by city planners in Bristol to persuade the police to make Kings Weston House their headquarters have failed, it was learned this afternoon.

Mr Iain Patterson, the city planning officer, told members that Avon and Somerset police authority firmly intended to abandon Kings Weston House as a future headquarters.

As to the future of the Vanbrugh architectural gem, a listed building, the letter from the police said it would be some years before a new police HQ was ready for occupation and the

future of Kings Weston House had not yet been considered by the police authority.

"It is, however, clear that it will not be required for any police purpose," the letter said.

Bristol planners had drawn up a new draft plan for police HQ at the house following rejection of original police plans.

But the police say their principal reason for deciding to leave Kings Weston is that the site is not large enough for all their needs.

The police view is that

for a new HQ to be built on a virgin site, avoiding big spending on maintenance of Kings Weston House and the restoration of three derelict buildings now in the city's care.

Mr Patterson told planners today: "The police decision to withdraw from Kings Weston House poses very considerable problems. There have been inquiries from possible users. There's a need to find a suitable user for the house who will be able to afford to maintain it and use it in a sympathetic manner."

## Police accused over HQ

Avon and Somerset police will use Kings Weston House for another 10 years, Bristol planning chairman Cllr Brian Richards forecast.

But the historic house will not become headquarters for the police authority the planners heard yesterday.

Cllr Richards blamed the police for "putting their heads in the sand."

He could not accept that city planners could be accused of being in the wrong over the house.

Planners had to accept some responsibility for the way things had turned out, but some also rested on residents.

### EXCESS

Cllr Wally Jenkins (Lab, Bedminster) said the real demands of the police were far in excess of what had been originally represented.

He, too, was disappointed that the police would not have a central headquarters in Bristol.

But the police were saying that the site was not suitable.

"Some of us were saying that in the first place," said Cllr Jenkins.

Cllr Steve Williams (Con, Stockwood), expressed that the situation could be quite serious, and expensive.

Evening Post

3rd Sept 1980

Evening Post  
4th Sept 80

Evening Post, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1978



A model of the proposed Avon and Somerset police headquarters and training school at Lawrence Weston with Kingsweston House (centre-right). The model is on display today at Twyford House in Shirehampton, Bristol.

## Now police plans are on display

Plans for the controversial scheme to turn Bristol's historic Kingsweston House into the new Avon and Somerset police headquarters went on show in Shirehampton today.

The exhibition, which includes a detailed model of the multi-million pound scheme, is being held at Twyford House community education centre in the High Street, tonight until 7.30 pm, and tomorrow from 2.30 pm to 7.30 pm.

It has been organised by Avon County Council at the request of Shirehampton Community Council for local residents to get a good look at the scheme before a public meeting being held on Thursday.

### OPPORTUNITY

The meeting, in Portway Lower School at 7.30 pm, has been organised by Bristol City Council, who are being asked to give outline approval to Avon's plans.

Staff from Avon's county architects' department will be at Twyford House to explain the plans, which are on view in the area for only the second time since the scheme was announced in September.

Mr Bob Chubb, community council chairman, said: "We felt it was an ideal opportunity for people to see the scheme in rather more detail than if they were at a meeting."

"The more people who see the details and know what they are talking about, the better."



## The big decision is delayed

Bristol planners, who are being asked to give outline permission to the multi-million pound Avon and Somerset police scheme, deferred their decision after visiting Kingsweston House yesterday.

Their move was expected because of last night's public meeting. Committee chairman, Cllr Brian Richards, said it would have been unwise until the strength of local feeling had been tested.

Committee members, accompanied by city planning officer Mr Jim Preston, and other council officials, spent more than an hour looking round the grounds of Vanburgh's 18th century house.

### SCEPTICAL

They saw the site of the proposed main administrative block at the back of the house, the stepped site of the main car park overlooking Avonmouth, and the location of student accommodation between the brewhery and the laundry.

Councillors were par-

ticularly concerned about tree screening, the height of the proposed radio mast and the effect of vehicles using the garage and vehicle maintenance depot.

Cllr Wally Jenkins, a strong critic of the scheme, was sceptical about the police authority's low estimate of the number of vehicles using it.

The committee were accompanied on their tour by members of Kingsweston Preservation Society including chairman Mr Douglas Johnson and secretary Mrs Sally Silcock, who oppose the scheme.

They were able to show councillors the number of people using the estate footpaths, which local residents claim will be closed to them if permission is given.

ENING POST, FRIDAY, JANUARY 20 1978

# Kingsweston House headquarters scheme



Informal party at Portway Lower School for last night's public meeting. From left: Mr Jesse Bull, acting assistant chief constable, Mr Martin Kenchington, Mr Neville Pearce (partly hidden), Cllr Ian Crawford, Cllr Brian Richards, Mr Jim Preston, Cllr Geoffrey Keeley (partly hidden), Mr G W Puttick and Mr Ron Thomas, MP.

## Police get a

A PACKED meeting of 500 residents gave a firm thumbs-down to a multi-million pound plan to move Avon and Somerset Police HQ to the grounds of Bristol's historic Kingsweston House.

The meeting was called by the city planners at Portway Lower School, Shirehampton, last night, to explain what lay behind the plans.

At the end of the meeting Cllr Brian Richards, chairman of Bristol Planning Committee, promised that the residents' views would be made known to his committee. They claimed:

IT WOULD create extra traffic on Shirehampton

from

cont

Road, which was used by many schoolchildren.

IT COULD be followed by extensions which would be the thin end of a planning expansion wedge;

IT WOULD be detrimental to the surroundings of Kingsweston House, which were used by residents;

THERE would be additional noise from police vehicles at the headquarters;

A 150FT tall radio mast would be an eyesore and possibly open to terrorist attack;

THERE had been insufficient consultation with residents before the plans reached an advanced stage; and

IT COULD equally well be sited elsewhere.

Opening the debate, Police Authority chairman Cllr Ian Crawford suggested the plans would meet opposition from people who lived close to the site and used it, from those who did not understand the planning application, and from those who "will oppose anything."

Avon and Somerset Police Force, he said, covered an area which involved 1.3 million people.

One particular advantage of using Kingsweston House would be proximity of the motorway system.

The former Bristol police headquarter, which now housed a force which merged Somerset and Bath Constabulary, Bristol police and a "very large" proportion of the Gloucestershire force, were using new Bridewell police headquarters which were originally for one force, and people were "crammed" in there.

The police authority had done a considerable amount of research over a number of years, knowing that one day they would have to have a new headquarters.

Kingsweston House was acquired by Bristol Watch Committee some seven years ago for £300,000 and "it is pointless to look for another site when we already own one."

A site in the centre of Bristol could cost them a million pounds, he said.

## Maintenance

Fears that a police car maintenance depot would lead to a large number of cars entering and leaving the headquarters were not well founded, he said. "Probably 10 to 20 a day would go in."

They would be there for maintenance and not driven in and out at all hours of the day or night.

"The question of public access is of extreme importance," he said.

"If the present level of public use of the grounds were to continue, that in itself would not create any problem."

Speaking of plans for the 150ft radio mast, he said: "I wish someone could invent a mast 10 inches long and the thickness of a pencil."

But they had been advised that the farther it went away from the house the more likely it was that they would have to have another relay mast to pick up signals from it.

"There is bound to be a security problem with any radio communication really," he said.

A small area would also have to be made secure for cars.

While they could not allow normal public access to the buildings, which would include an administrative block, training school and motor maintenance area; they had over the past years always made the main house available to the public by appointment, and there were police open days as well as many things the police did to make buildings available.

While the wireless aerial would obviously have to be "fairly well lit", it was primarily important to light the lower part and lighting could be shone down on to it without shining into people's windows.

He personally would like to see the building floodlit in the same way as the Clifton Suspension Bridge.

"As far as the police authority are concerned, if we are not able to develop this site there is bound to be a very large question mark over our wishing to retain the site."

## Long term

It was a large and very extensive building, and if they did not retain it and it was sold it might be open to "more objectionable development."

In that event, if someone made the police authority a suitable offer it would enable them to buy another site. They might accept the offer, and this might not be in the long-term interests of the residents.

Avon county architect Mr

## STORY:

Roger Burton

## PICTURES:

Ralph Hudd

Martin Henchington said 35 trees would have to be cut down for the buildings, including six "really good" trees.

"But it is proposed to plant a very large number of new trees."

The problem in the woods surrounding the house was that since 1935, because there had been a number of people in occupation, the trees had been allowed to deteriorate in any case.

## 'No skyscraper'

The existing entrance in Kingsweston Lane must be closed as it was a danger to traffic, he said, and it would be used only in an emergency.

They proposed to "mask" the car park with planting and low walls.

"This is a headquarters, it is not a police station," he stressed.

He also denied a suggestion that one of the buildings would be a "skyscraper" and said it would be graduated from one storey at the edge to three storeys.

It was proposed to take down the old iron staircase and other "bits and pieces" and restore the house to the way it was when it was remodelled by Robert Mylne in the 1760s.

The plans, he said, had been informally supported by the Royal Fine Arts Commission, and the Historic Buildings Council had welcomed them because of

Evening Post, February, 1978.

# Keep private hands off Kingsweston

In response to Mr Chubb's letter on the subject of Kingsweston, I would take issue with him on the fact that my assumption was untested. Two public meetings made it patently obvious that the vast majority of those attending did not want the area developed in line with the police proposals.

It is true that neither chairman of the meetings would allow a vote to be taken—but that was not the fault of those who attended.

Short of a public referendum I fail to see how my "assumption" could be "tested" except by the general feeling expressed at those meetings and which (I hope) was reflected by the decision of the Bristol planners.

## Hard work

From this point on I think I tend to share Mr Chubb's doubts to some extent. The members of Kingsweston Preservation Society (I am not a member) put in a great deal of hard work, research and personal expense toward publicising the police proposals.

For this Bristolians should be grateful.

However, I believe that the amounts of money are simply too big for them to raise when speaking of purchase, restoration and future maintenance of the property.

## National Trust

The National Trust would be a solution but I doubt if they would be prepared to buy—they would expect it to be given as a going concern which they simply had to maintain thereafter.

When speaking of costs it seems that there is an assumption that the police would expect the current market value as though selling the land on the open development market. I fail to see why.

A public service should not expect to make a profit by selling to a public authority.

The price should be whatever they originally paid for it, plus any interest they have had to pay in the meanwhile, and enough to cover the cost of whatever restoration

work they have carried out during their occupation.

In conclusion I would say that there must be several schools of thought on the estate. Those who are interested in the architecture of the buildings, those who are interested in keeping open space and those who view the estate and buildings as an entity.

In my view it would be an act of vandalism to allow the buildings to decay but it is vastly more important that the grounds should remain open for public use.

It is for this reason that I am concerned that Bristol Corporation should purchase the area and that it should not be passed into private hands or left to await some future planning proposals by the police or anyone else.

A. J. Moore  
51, Trym Side, Sea Mills, Bristol BS9 2NA.

*Edney Post, January 20th, 1978*

the large number of major houses destroyed through lack of occupation.

There would be about 700 people coming on to the site. While they would at first be people employed by the police authority, later it was likely that local employment opportunities would arise.

The first broadside for the residents came from Avon's Cllr Ernie Bristow, of Moor End Gardens, Lawrence Weston, who was greeted with applause when he said people did not want the headquarters at Kingsweston House, and there was plenty of room in the City Docks area.

He asked for a vote at the meeting on how many people did not want the headquarters there.

Meeting chairman Cllr Richards said: "It is not my intention to take a vote — it is a fact-finding meeting."

Mrs Annie Bell, of Kingsweston Avenue, Shirehampton, said: "It disturbs me to see how far the development has gone without even a say so to the people here."

### Size

Mr Michael Brennan said he was concerned about an increase in traffic in his road which was used by "crowds of schoolchildren."

Mrs Sally Silcock, secretary of the Kingsweston

Preservation Society, said she was concerned that other buildings would follow the initial development.

Cllr Crawford said the proposal would give all the accommodation needed for a force of this size in the foreseeable future.

"Police forces of this size are the right size and they don't want to get any bigger."

### 'Clip'

"I don't think there is any intention of our wanting a larger police headquarters than we want at present."

Mr Dennis Stacey, of Lower High Street, Shirehampton, said: "You have ravaged England in the number of years since I was a small boy."

"If you think you are

# PCs 'are not as pretty as the birds...'

going to do it here you have another think coming.

"Don't think I am anti-police — I am not.

"I have had a clip on the ear as a young boy and it did me a world of good . . . I wish there was more of it now."

Mrs Yvonne Baker, of Coombe Dingle, said she questioned the need for a centralised headquarters and could see no need for a police school in the same place.

"I have asked a lot of policemen what they think about this site.

"They say they would far rather this money was spent getting more policemen on the ground, because it is more policemen we need.

"It has been made quite clear from the platform that they have looked at this site and they have asked 'What is the best use we can make of the site?'

"I think what would have been better is: 'What is best for this site and the community?'

### Vandalism\*

"You cannot pretend the site will become anything but urbanised," she added.

Mr Michael McGreevy, of Goldsbury Walk, Lawrence Weston, was greeted with loud applause when he said: "The most gross act of vandalism was committed by the police themselves when they tore up the original cobbled yard in front of the stables."

Mr Gordon Priest, vice-chairman of Bristol Civic Society, said the building was of national as well as local significance.

Mr Doug Johnson, chairman of Kingsweston Preservation Society, said: "Our main concern is the risk of terrorism.

"This main centre will be a very vulnerable unit."

People would prefer a police station at Shirehampton, he suggested.

### 'Enchanting'

Mrs Gillian Barrington, of Station Road, Shirehampton, who has three children and a dog, said: "I cross the park every day. It is beautiful, it is enchanting."

"We moved from Bristol two years ago to escape from concrete blocks, where there were no parks and no walking on the grass.

"What is going to happen if the centre is used by the police during the day?

"Children play there and fly their kites and people go for picnics. How can we expect to do that with cars going along from the police depot?

"The woods are full of birds and animals and also wild flowers. My children in a short space of time have learned a great deal."

### Nesting...

"Some of the birds there are very rare, jays have started nesting there just in the last two years — they have not been seen there for many years."

However nice policemen might be to look at they weren't as pretty as the birds, she added.

Bristol North-West MP Mr Ron Thomas, who rushed back from London to hear the views put forward at last night's meeting, said today he was totally opposed to the development.

"Therefore, along with the Labour councillors in the area, I shall do whatever I can to prevent it taking place," he said.

"One speaker summed it up for me when he talked about the aesthetic qualities of the building and landscape together. You cannot preserve one without the other."

*Evening Post, May 26th 1978.*

# **Stately home is on the brink of ruin**

Bristol Society of Architects have demanded swift action to save threatened Kingsweston House.

President Ian Thornton said: "It is remarkable that it has taken only the last 40 years of a 260 year life for neglect, indecision and division — into separate ownerships — to lead a once magnificent and beautiful group of buildings in landscape to the very brink of irretrievable ruin."

"Swift action is needed to save Kingsweston. The trees and woods are dying, the areas owned by the City are neglected and ruined and will soon be beyond recall."

Mr Thornton said that since proposals to use the buildings as the new county police headquarters had been refused, concern for Kingsweston had increased.

He described the Vanbrugh stately home with its beautiful outbuildings as "possibly Bristol's greatest architectural asset, being in

By JAMES BELSEY

terms of remaining buildings, a virtually complete early 18th century household from the hand of one of England's greatest architects."

Mr Thornton confessed: "We are very worried."

"Whatever the reasons for the rejection of the Police HQ proposals, when this particular bathwater was thrown out, the body, in the form of a vision of a revitalised Kingsweston under one ownership, went too."

"It would be tragic if the two principal owners of land and buildings at Kingsweston House, the police and the City, could find no formula for safeguarding its future as a whole."

Avon and Somerset police are considering appealing against Bristol planners' refusal to give planning permission for Kingsweston House to be used as their new headquarters.

## **Save this treasure**

BRISTOL City Council's near-disastrous prevarication over Ashton Court mansion — now rescued at the very last minute — must not be allowed to blight the even greater treasure of Kingsweston House. The council's misguided decision not to approve plans for the police to inherit this unique 18th century masterpiece has placed the very future of the Kingsweston estate in jeopardy.

Historic outbuildings are collapsing through the neglect of the past 40 years, and swift action is needed to reverse that process.

Even the very trees and woods on the estate are dying, a bitter testimonial to lack of care.

As Bristol Society of Architects point out today, the rejection of the Police plan could throw the baby out with the bathwater, for there are no alternative plans to rescue this part of our heritage. The Kingsweston estate is situated in a marginal ward and the future of this place threatens to become a party political issue. This must not happen.

We still believe that the single ownership of the Police would be the best answer to the Kingsweston House problem. They would be excellent custodians — and city councillors should reconsider their ill-advised decision.

Evening Post, June 3rd, 1978

# Kingsweston: Custodians have special responsibilities

The future of Kingsweston House, its garden pavilions and its landscape is indeed in peril and must cause great concern to everyone. Ian Thornton, the President of Bristol Society of Architects is right to raise the issue now in order to highlight the problems.

However, his statement implies, and your editorial clearly affirms that the City Council's decision to reject the planning application for the headquarters buildings on the site has created the crisis and the threat to this magnificent part of Bristol's (and the nation's) heritage.

## Heritage

In Bristol Civic Society's view, this simply not the case. As we see it, the facts are these:

The Police Authority, with the Home Office, own the building and the landscape now. They have restored the building, they use it, they are custodians of an important piece of the national heritage.

They cannot dodge responsibilities by saying in effect, we will maintain our responsibilities to the community if the community grants us permission to make major alterations to that piece of heritage, by building intensively in the landscape setting of the house.

## Pressure

We are firmly convinced that the H.Q. building and all the ancillary uses proposed would be disastrous to the future of Kingsweston and not, in any way, a means of saving it.

Inevitably, with a new, centralised organisation like this, future expansion would be needed.

Inevitably, whatever is

said now, the police would end up needing an enclosed, "defendable" space. Free public access could not possibly be maintained.

Inevitably, the landscape would be altered beyond recognition by the new buildings, however sensitively they were designed.

Bristol Civic Society will continue to resist pressure to "give in" to the police authority on this uniquely important planning issue, because it believes:

1. That Kingsweston in its landscape setting must be preserved.

2. The landscape is, by right of long established use, part of Bristol's public open space, that should be maintained for the local community and for the city at large.

## Access

3. The building and its setting is so important that it requires special responsibilities of its owners. These responsibilities include the maintenance of the buildings, the protection and restoration of the landscape, the maintenance of public access and at least occasional access to the architecturally important parts of the mansion.

4. Under these circumstances, the only proper way for the Police, the County and the Home Office to proceed is to continue the current use of the building as a training school, thus recognising their special responsibilities as custodians of Kingsweston and to look elsewhere for a site for their new headquarters.

Gordon Priest  
Chairman, Bristol Civic  
Society  
25 Great George Street,  
Bristol 4.

Evening Post  
2nd April 1979.

# Society's plea over historic house

Bristol Civic Society today called on politicians and Government agencies to put their heads together over the problem of Kingsweston House.

Their chairman, Mr Gordon Priest, appealed to the Avon, Somerset and Bristol City authorities, the Home Office and the Historic Buildings Council to get together to resolve the problem.

The society, opposed the scheme to develop Kingsweston House and its grounds as HQ for the Avon and Somerset police authority. Now they consider that Bristol's decision to

refuse planning permission was a correct one.

Kingsweston House was a national monument of primary importance in terms of our artistic heritage and of architectural history.

The Home Office, as owner of the building, could in no way abrogate their responsibility in terms of maintenance.

In the Civic Society's opinion, the overriding consideration is the importance of the building in its own setting.

## VALUE

The society are still convinced that in spite of the quality of the architecture of the additions proposed, the result would be irreparable harm to the building in its setting and deprivation to local residents of an open space.

But, Mr Priest pointed out, the society also recognised that the best way to ensure the future of the

building and the cheapest way to do it was to encourage the present tenants to stay.

The problem was that the police leased a building of immense architectural and landscape value. They were not making full economic use of the building and wished to capitalise their asset by developing the site for HQ.

Western Daily Press 20th April 1979

# Police are told to think again

By Jonathan Shorley

AVON and Somerset Police are to think again about dropping plans to develop Bristol's Kingsweston House as their new headquarters.

This follows a special plea yesterday by city planners worried that the drop the plan was not viable, but other schemes for the site would not come the original intentions.

Now the police authority is to consider submitting a revised plan for the house, which it uses at present as a training school.

Last month the police dropped the idea following rejection of the scheme by the city council's Planning committee a year ago.

## OBJECTIONS

The police decided reluctantly they could not overcome the planners' objections that the development would be too intensive.

Police authority staff began looking for suitable 20-acre sites outside Bristol to replace the cramped New Bridewell headquarters in central Bristol.

Police authority chairman Conservative Councillor Ian Crawford and Chief Constable Mr Kenneth Steele were invited to yesterday's committee meeting.

## Complex would ruin 'treasure'

Kingsweston Preservation Society wholeheartedly agree with your editorial: "Save this treasure", and with the president of the Bristol Society of Architects, who was reported in the same issue as saying: "Swift action is needed to save Kingsweston".

However, we believe that the City council was

right to withhold planning permission for a headquarters complex on the site for Avon and Somerset police.

This involved large modern buildings, car parks and roads, and this society together with other groups and local residents felt that these would do immense harm to the environment of the House itself and the Kingsweston area.

Sally Silcock  
Secretary

4, Kingsweston Court,  
Kingsweston Lane, Bristol

Evening Post  
1 Jun. 1978.

# Have people's park at Kingsweston

It is to be regretted that once again the editorial in the "Post" is bemoaning the departure of the police from Kingsweston House. The editorial appears to ignore the fact that two public meetings of local people clearly indicated that they did not wish to have the proposed development at Kingsweston.

Neither is it true that the police have been good "housekeepers" — to date they have not even complied with the DOE instructions to restore the damage they did to the cobble yard they tore up.

It is also noted that the headlines of the paper now agree that the police HQ will be "huge" whereas previously the size of the proposed development was always underplayed in your reports.

Many people might also wonder why our police wish to be housed in such rural settings as they

seem to seek when the whole complex is much more suited to an industrial estate.

Could it be that the upper echelons of the force rather fancy offices with pretty country views instead of what most of the rest of us have to put up with?

## Private

If the "Post" really wishes to comment in a useful way, I suggest it starts by attacking Cllr Crawford's threats that the police may sell off the

house and land for private developers' use.

Bristol Corporation should be pushed into taking over the land as parkland for citizens' use in perpetuity.

The house is a problem — but the solution should ensure that it remains an open access building for citizens' use — possibly an extension to the Blaise House museum.

A J Moore  
51, Trym Side, Sea Mills, Bristol BS9 2HA.

# Police eye of building gem

By JIM WEBBER

BRISTOL'S Kingsweston House — the Vanbrugh architectural gem — and its grounds could still come the site of new police headquarters for Avon and Somerset, it was learned this afternoon.

Despite their previous refusal, city planners were asked today to approve a brief by city planning officer Mr Iain Patterson to

overcome objections to 1977 application.

The police have at one other site outside city that they are "a considering."

But Cllr Ian Crawford, chairman of the police committee, promised that if told prepared fresh proposals, the merits would be evaluated by the authority.

"We have not completely ruled out Kingsweston though it does look fairly likely," he said.

"Because of the Home Office requirements, our demands may be bigger and require than was contained in original application."

Evening Post  
6th June 80

# The big art treasure clean-up in a crime squad's HQ

WITH THE permission of the Chief Constable of Avon-McKennell Steele, the public will shortly be able to see a collection of portraits for the first time since they were painted more than 200 years ago.

More than £3,000 is now being spent on restoring the 36 paintings which are being displayed in the hall of the new training centre for detectives from all over South-West England.

Not the most likely place for the works of 18th century artists.

But it is the police, not the painters, which are likely to go home for place.

For the new home of the police training unit is Kings Weston House which was built by architect Sir John Venbrugh in 1710 as a home for the family of Sir Robert Southwell.

The paintings were commissioned by second generation Southwells as a sort of family portrait gallery.

They were hung in the main hall at Kings Weston when it was redecorated in the middle of the 18th century.

by  
**Nicholas  
Harrison**  
**WOODS**

The portraits — mostly by Scottish artist Allan Ramsay — were painted on pre-ordered sizes and placed in frames built into the walls of the main hall.

The effect was to enhance the symmetry of Venbrugh's rooms.

There they stayed until the 1940s when the house was abandoned as a private home in 1937 — was used as lodgings for wartime troops.

For safety's sake, the works of art went into storage, mostly in the cellars, but some to museums.

And like the house itself, they were neglected.

It was not until more than ten years after the end of the war when Bristol College of Science and Technology took over Kings Weston that the protective "plaster" board panels covering the frames on the walls were removed.

But still there was no serious move to restore

either the building or the paintings.

In 1970, Kings Weston House was falling without a semblance and the danger of its becoming seriously dilapidated.

As a Grade One listed building it did not have to be demolished and Bristol Corporation had to make use of it.

Five years later, the old police council Watch committee came up with the answer.

They bought Kings Weston from Bristol Municipal Charities for £305,000, half of the price coming from the Home Office providing a badly needed base for the training unit.

And as restoration work began, the paintings were rediscovered.

Then, in 1972, the Watch committee bought the paintings for a knock-down price of £8,435.

An approach to the Historic Buildings Council in London brought a grant of £1,500, nearly half the cost of putting them back into shape.

## SIZES

But with the grant came one condition that the art collection must be available to the public. At least one painting between each other.

Commodore Lafford, who was on the Watch committee when the paintings were bought, says: "The thing is that the paintings could not be shown anywhere else."

They were all painted to sizes governed by the house itself.

Restoration began last November and is likely to continue for another two months.

Richard Peter, partner in the Clifton firm of specialist restorers who won the contract, says: "All the paintings have needed some work done on them, but here and there there have been some which have been really bad."

Some had about 60 per cent of the original missing.

Most of them are by Allan Ramsay, who was a contemporary of Vanbrugh, and Reynolds, but less is known about some of the others.

There is one panel which could be school of Holbein.

The painstaking work is executed in the Clifton workshop and the paintings are taken back one by one to Kings Weston and replaced on the specially repainted walls.

## LUXURY

When the job is completed the main hall of the house will be much as it was when the Southwells lived there for 100 years in the 18th century.

But the view over the Avon to the Welsh hills, which made Sir Robert Southwell choose the site of his first place, has changed beyond recognition.

On the one hand, the growth of townships would probably not turn him elsewhere.

And on the other hand, things of his own home being used as a training centre for the county detective force anyone can see

# Now plans for police HQ get new look

A REVISED plan for the controversial new police HQ at historic Kingsweston House, Lawrence Weston, has been drawn up, city councillors have been told.

Members of the council's open spaces committee are to visit the Vanbrugh property to judge the scheme.

The revised plan has been prepared, following reservations by city planners on the previous scheme.

Cllr Mrs Gwyneth Hebbethwaite, Tory shadow chairman, urged that the HQ should stay in Bristol.

Matters had been held up because of City Council objections, she stressed.

Cllr Mrs Gwyneth Hebbethwaite, Tory shadow grave doubts about whether the police authority would stay in Bristol.

## COST

If they did go, the council would be left with a beautiful house which would be very costly to maintain.

Cllr Mrs Jeanette Britton (Lab, SS Philip and Jacob) thought the revised plan better than the previous one.

It involved new land, and the open spaces committee would want certain assurances before they agreed.

The chairman, Cllr Bert Wilcox (Lab, Somerset), agreeing that the new proposals were far better, said they did not involve taking any of the land open to the public.

Also, the buildings would be more or less concealed, whereas previously, they would have been on the skyline.

Evening Post.  
Date Unknown.

## Blind eye to police decision

Despite thumbs down by the Avon and Somerset police authority, Bristol planners are still hoping Kingsweston House will become the force's headquarters.

Last month the police told city planners they no longer considered Kingsweston as a site for their future HQ.

The planning committee knew the police were looking at a site between Clevedon Court and the M5.

## APPROACH

Optimistically it has authorised the city planning officer to approach the police authority to find out why the city's latest Kingsweston scheme is not considered suitable.

He will also ask the police authority to tell planners about their future plans for their occupation of Kingsweston House — the police own it — in view of their plan to locate the HQ elsewhere.

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