

Daily Telegraph Sat 25th June

I like the phrase "aficionados of ancient buildings"

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J.

In your dreams

PROPERTY OF THE WEEK

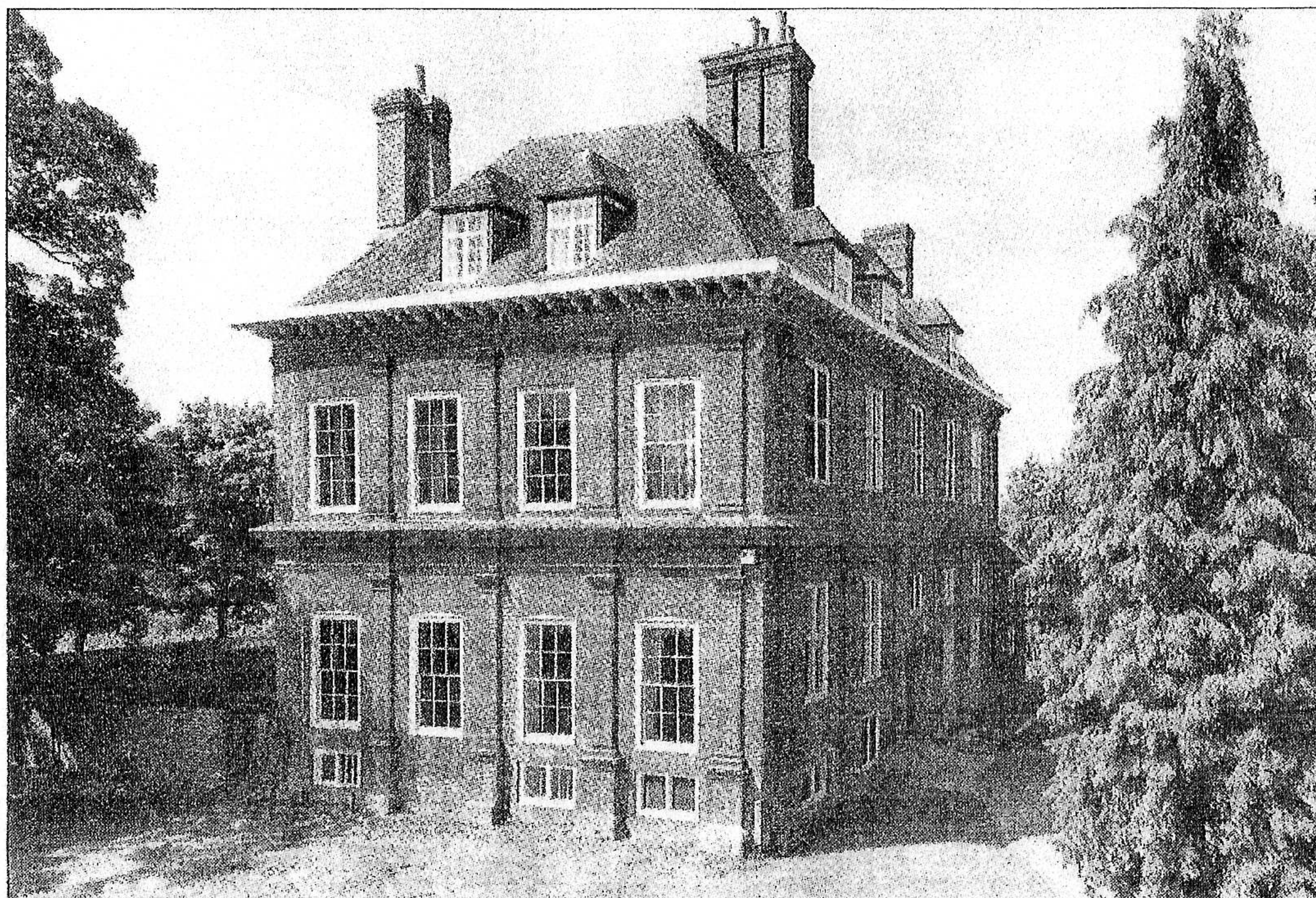
Kent

Bridge Place, near Canterbury, is one of those mellow brick buildings so weathered by time that it is as much part of the landscape as the towering trees that surround it. Built in 1638 during the reign of King Charles I – although it was completed in 1659, after his execution – the house is a 400-year-old timewarp – even the ornately carved, four-poster beds have not been moved since the house was newly completed. Oak panelling, unique “fish scale” cornicing in the main bedrooms and extravagant stucco work on the ceilings are equally untouched, as is the Cromwellian armour – shields, breastplates and helmets, strewn about the place as if the owner had just come back from battle to a nice hot bath.

The Grade-II* house was built for a Catholic Flemish merchant, Sir Arnold Braems, at a time when Catholics were heavily persecuted for practising their faith. It contains not one, but two priestholes for hiding those Catholic priests brave enough to conduct Mass. The holes are so cleverly hidden that current owner Peter Malkin, an aficionado of ancient buildings, has to demonstrate how they work.

At first glance, there is nothing special about the mauve-painted bookshelf, sparsely filled with pop CDs, except that the colour clashes rather badly with the floral-swirled carpet beneath it. But Peter Malkin presses his hand underneath the top shelf and, with a soft click, the bookcase swings into the wall, revealing a small dark recess, just about big enough for two people to crouch inside. The other, reached by a narrow corridor built into the thick external walls, holds four people.

These compartments now serve a modern need: they hide offensive clutter. Four hundred years old, they offer modern storage solutions: not only is the clutter hidden, but so are the cupboards themselves, buried inside 4ft thick walls.

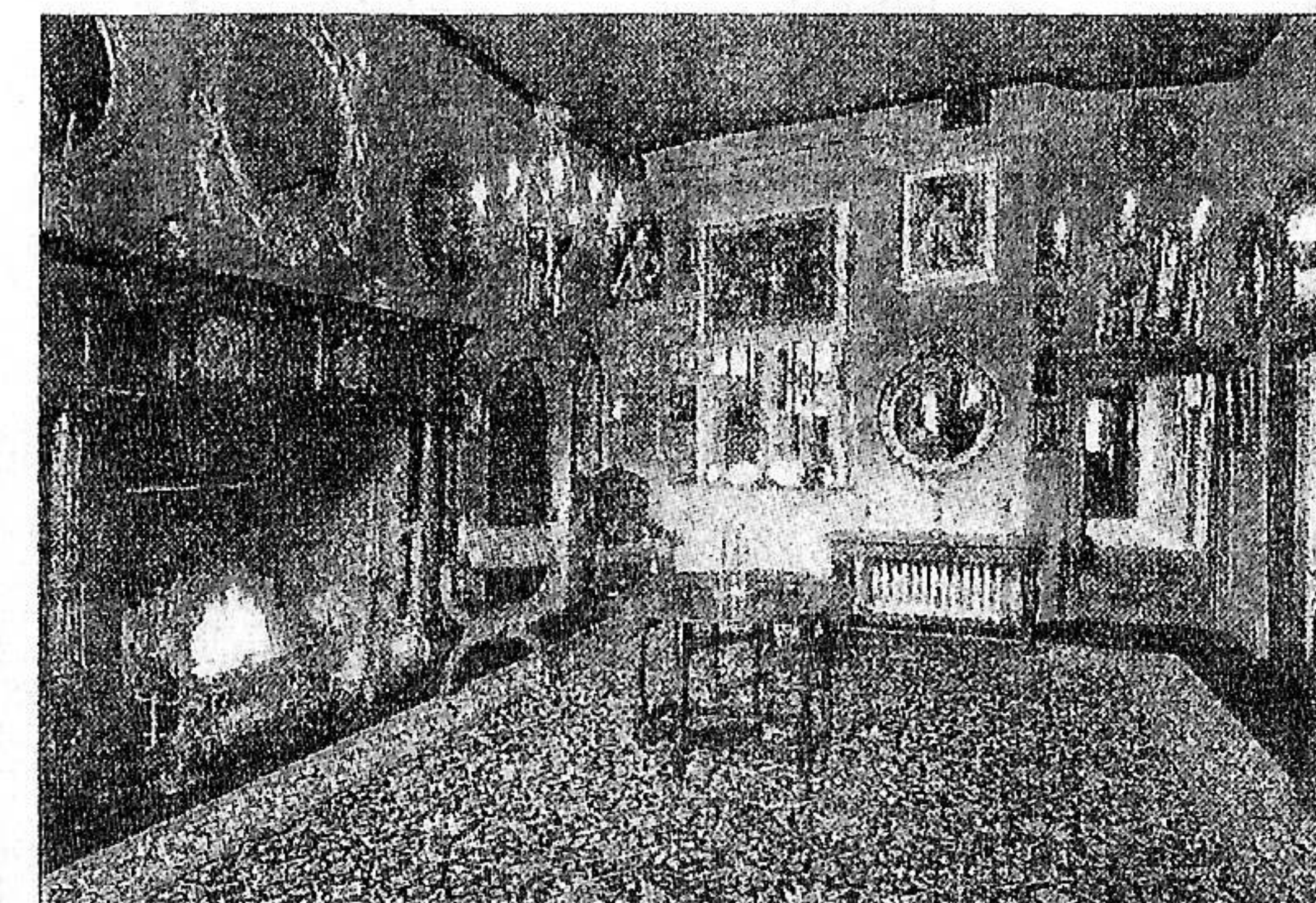


Peter Malkin's ancestors lived in the seven-bedroom house at the end of the 17th century and his family's coat of arms, displaying a lion and

a griffin in carved stone, still rests above the front door today. “I was always interested in my family history and in old houses, so

when this place came on the market in 1967, I was desperate to buy it,” he says. When he bought Bridge Place, Mr Malkin, who describes

himself as “conservationist and entrepreneur” had been in the entertainment business, running a jazz club at the Bromley Court Hotel,



featuring artists such as Acker Bilk and Kenny Ball. It wasn't long before Bridge Place became a well known watering hole for the well-heeled of Kent, continuing a long tradition of hospitality at the house. In 1661, social commentator and bon viveur Willem Schellinks wrote of then owner Arnold Braems: “This gentleman is so amiable and hospitable and keeps a princely board,” going on to describe tables groaning with fish, game and meats provided by the estate. There are pheasant and rabbits in the 12 acres of meadow and woodland that come with the house and the Nailbourne River, which flows through the estate, is

home to sweet, speckled brown trout.

There is still a bar and dance floor on the lower ground floor of a wing which was partially pulled down at the end of the 17th century after a fire. But more than a place for entertaining, Mr Malkin hopes the house will go to a family whose children will relish the playground of such a mysterious and captivating house. “Just think of the games of hide and seek they could play,” he says.

Sarah Lonsdale

● Bridge Place is for sale with Strutt & Parker (01227 451123). Offers over £2 million are invited.

GOODMANORS

MY KINGDOM FOR THIS HOUSE

Bridge Place, built for a loyal supporter of Charles II, needs a new owner who will defend it to the hilt, writes Marcus Binney

BRIDGE PLACE needs to relive its age of glory, which came in 1660 when Charles II knighted its owner, Arnold Braemes, in Canterbury on his triumphant way to London to reclaim his throne. Braemes, descended from a Flemish merchant who had settled in Sandwich, was an ardent Royalist who had funded the King.

In 1661 Braemes was visited by the Dutch artist Willem Schellinks, who sketched his grand house and wrote that "he keeps a princely table" and had "an extraordinary number of visits from knights and high-born gentlemen and their ladies".

At the time of Braemes's death in 1681 another Dutch artist, Jan Siberechts, did a magnificent canvas of the house, showing a grand front in warm red brick with steep roof and dormers. Braemes had bought the estate in 1638 and the house he then built belongs to the remarkable group of early classical houses in Kent all in brick, which begins with Chevening, now the country home of the Foreign Secretary, and Broome Place, later home of Kitchener of Khartoum.

Alas, Braemes overstretched himself and in 1704 his house was bought by a neighbour, John Taylor of Bifrons, who, perhaps jealous of its splendour, demolished more than half of it. The handsome wing that remains cries out for a new chatelain with a passion for formal gardening who will re-create the "very fine and skilfully

Clues suggest that a still earlier house is encased there

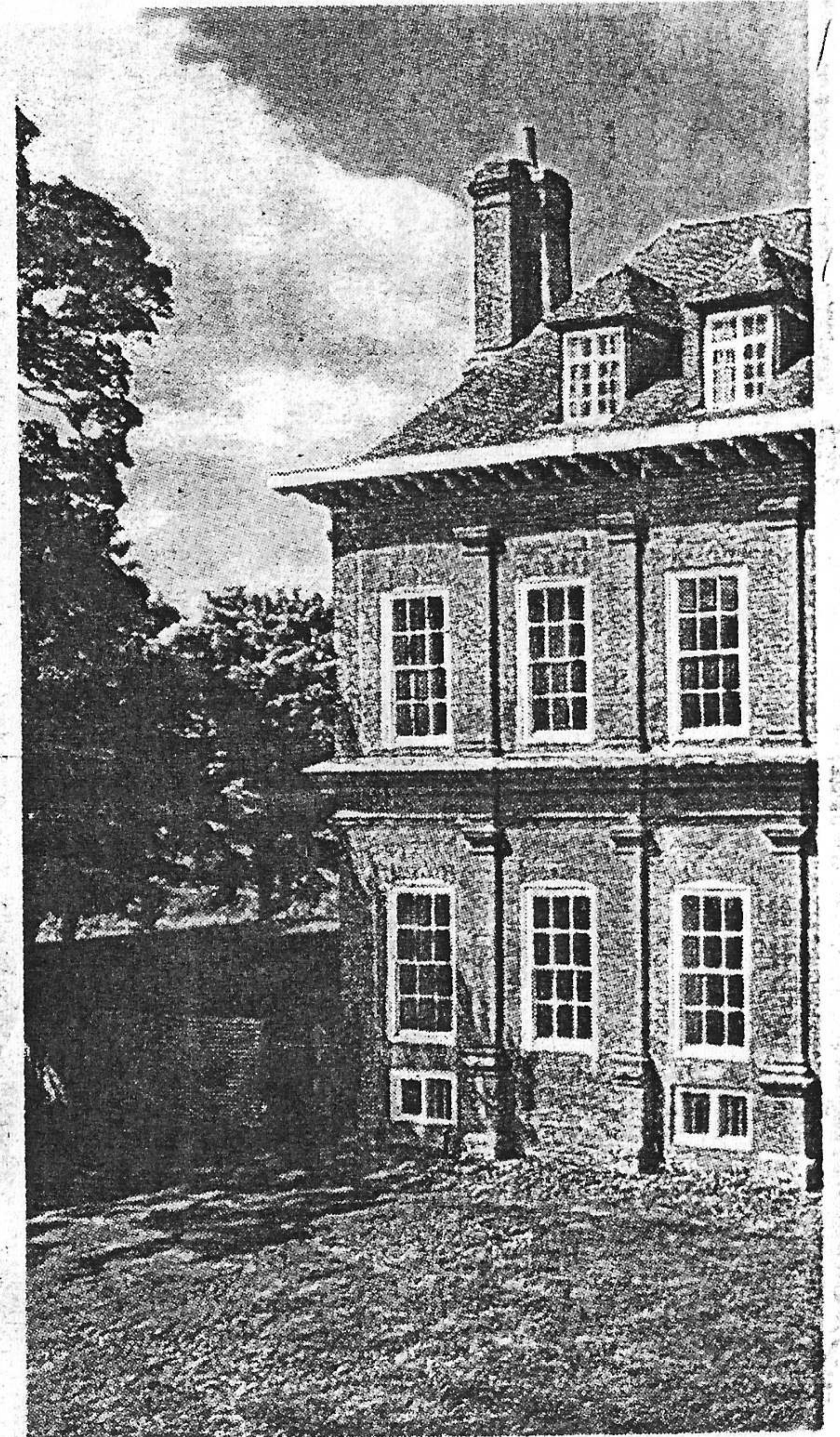
made pleasure gardens", orchards and vineyards described by Schellinks, complete with "dovecote like a chapel" and crystalline stream.

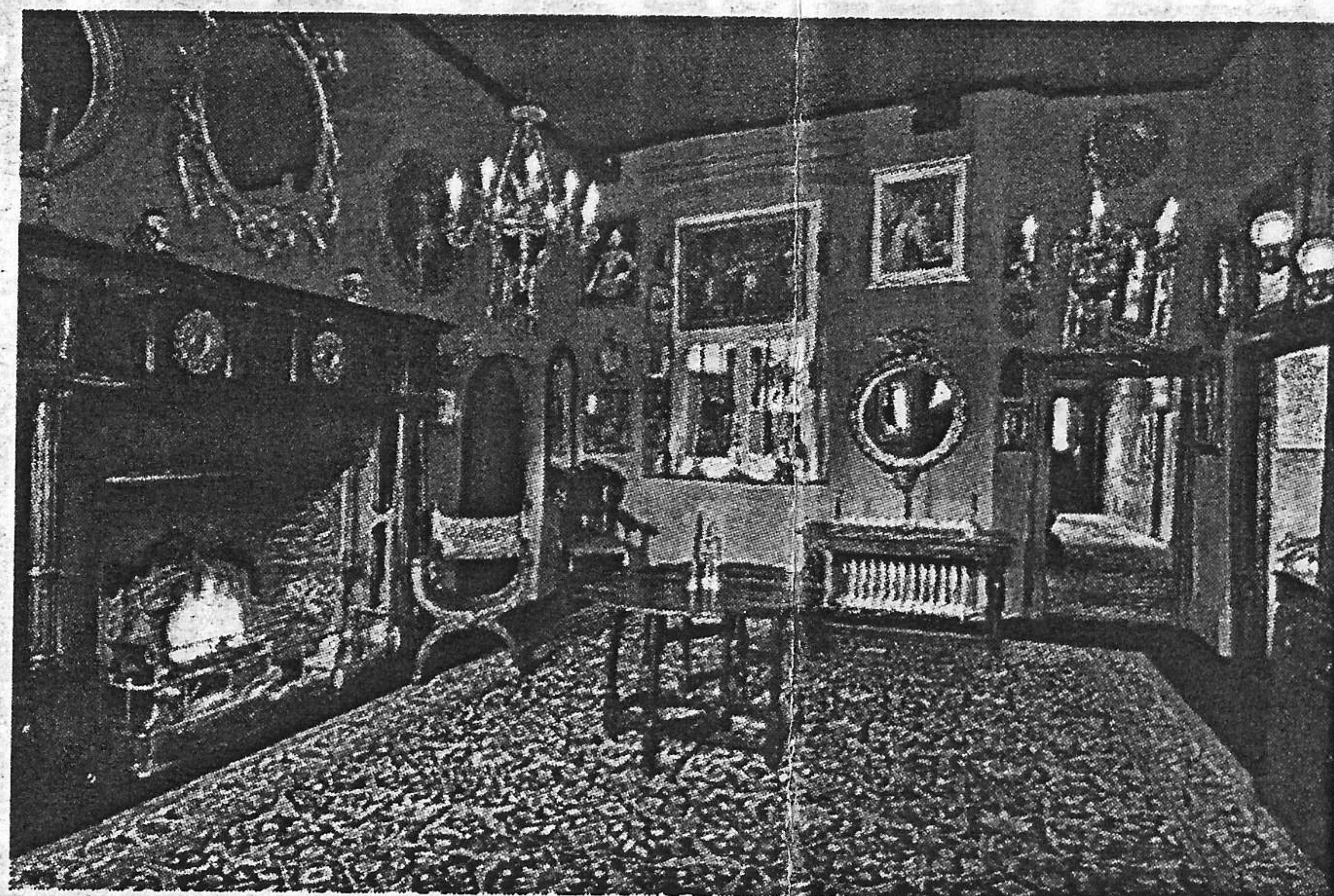
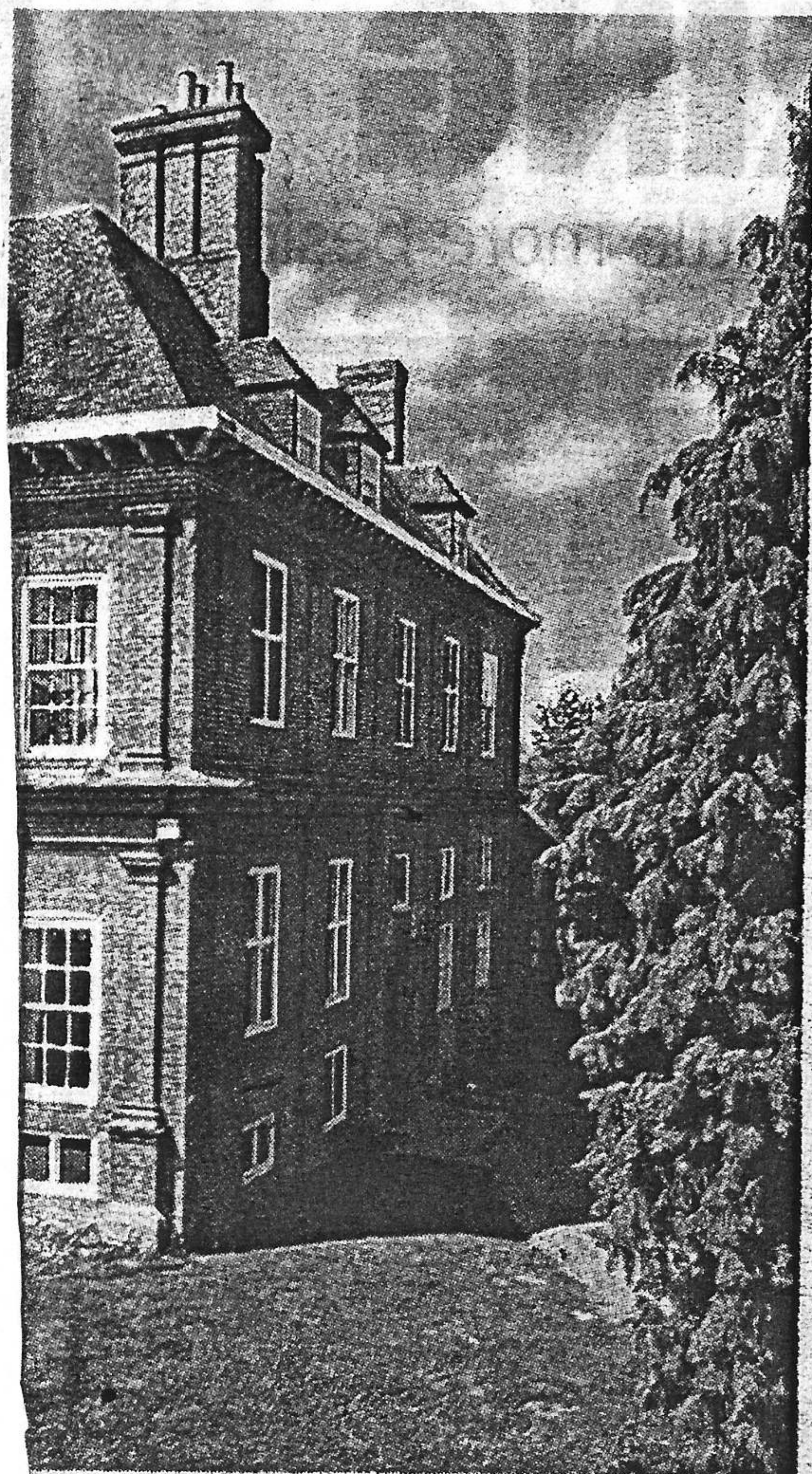
The brickwork, though weathered by time, is gloriously detailed with cut and moulded brick for window heads, cornice and a double row of pilasters. Yet there are puzzles too. The pilasters on the present entrance front are longer than

those around the corner, where Georgian sashes have been inserted and the windows "dropped" at the same time.

Yet these are nothing to the puzzles that abound inside. For nearly 40 years Bridge Place has belonged to Peter Malkin, a compulsive rescuer of endangered domains who bought the shell of Boringdon Hall, outside Plymouth, and restored it as an hotel. At Bridge Place he opened a country club and today the interiors are filled with swords and gilt mirrors. Still earlier, probably before or after the First World War, another owner with a craze for woodwork introduced quantities of antique panelling.

I went with Richard Garnier, Kent's foremost house detective, who quickly spotted that two of the fireplace surrounds were made of engraved Bethersden marble comparable to that used about 1605 in the ballroom at Knole, the greatest house in Kent. These and other details such as Tudor chamfers (angled edges) to wooden doorways suggest that there might be a still earlier house encased in Bridge Place.





The glory days of Bridge Place, near Canterbury, were in the 1660s, but the house still offers grandeur on a compact scale for £1,975,000

The finest feature of the interior is a grand elm staircase with balustrades splendid enough to be altar rails for Archbishop Laud, that fervent supporter of Charles I, complete with hanging ball drops at the corners. The flights are not short as in many Jacobean houses, but long like some contemporary aristocratic houses in Paris.

Upstairs the estate agent's brochure offers a tantalising glimpse of what looks like a 1740s Baroque ceiling by itinerant Italian plasterers, complete with floating putti. Yet around it are Adam motifs that came into use only 30 years later. Another work, it seems, of early 20th-century antiquarianism. A further clue lies in the carved stone entrance doorway, again early 20th centu-

ry in date. Gothic in style, this is carved with a portcullis suggesting an MP as owner and is now embellished with the name of Mr Malkin's son, Oliver.

Bridge Place needs an owner who will rise to the thrill of researching its fascinating history, particularly in the gardens, where the 17th-century walls remain around the boundaries. For the adventurous soul with time and patience, the house offers genuine architectural grandeur on a compact scale, with fine views over the valley and two floors of bedrooms for relays of friends coming to help with the great project. *Bridge Place is for sale for £1,975,000 through Strutt & Parker, 01227 451123*

FACTFILE

WHAT YOU GET: Seven bedrooms (four of them en suite), four reception rooms.

WHERE IT IS: Bridge is three miles east of Canterbury, just off the A2.

BEST SCHOOLS: The King's School Canterbury (boys and girls); good primary school in Bridge village.

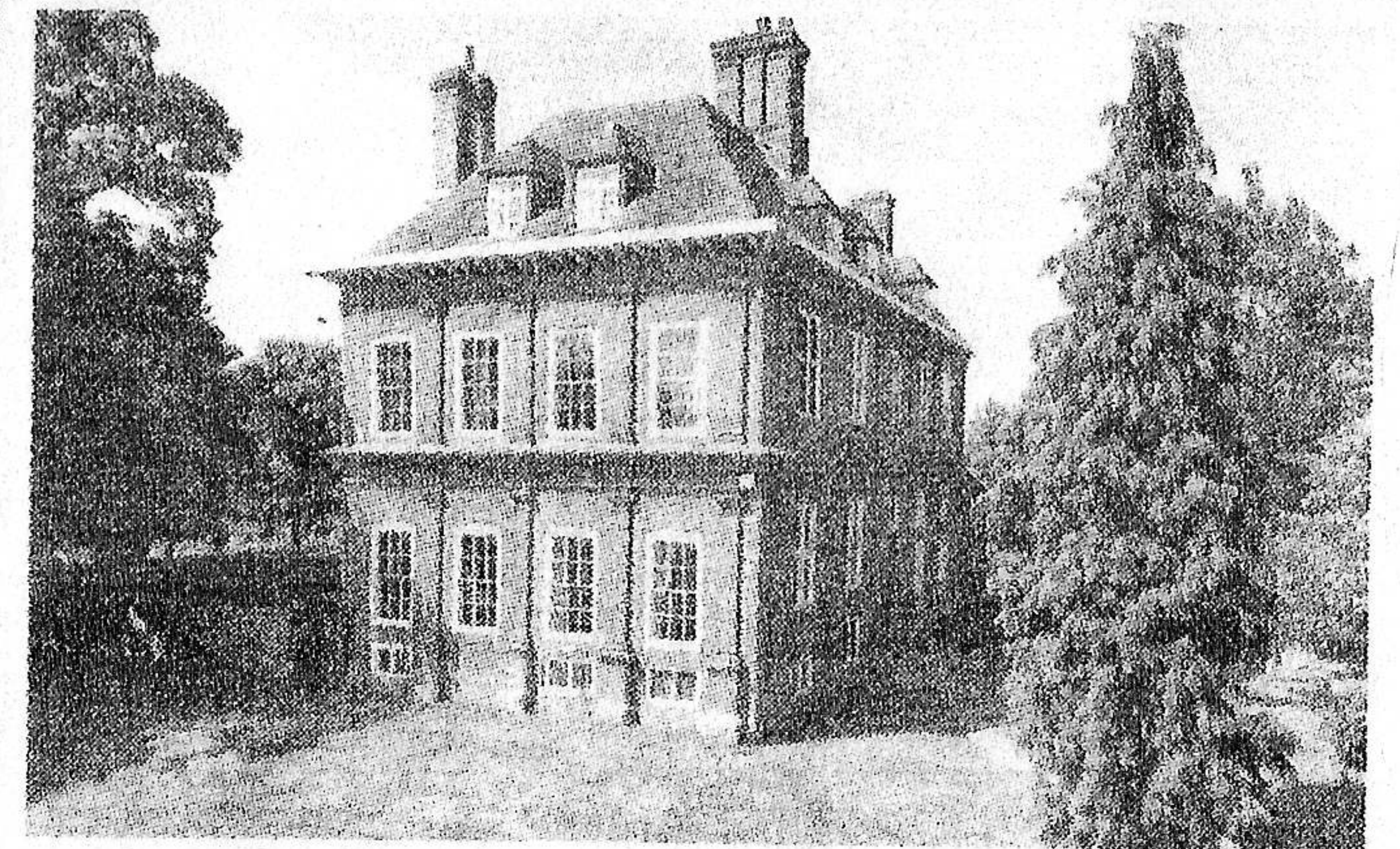
WHERE TO EAT: Augustine's in Canterbury (01227 453063); Skippers in Bridge (01227 830788).

PERFECT FOR: The future Charles III?

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visit www.struttandparker.com for further properties

**STRUTT &
PARKER** 



Bridge

A2/M2 1 mile, Canterbury 3 miles, London 63 miles

A magnificent Grade II Listed Jacobean manor, now offering a unique opportunity to re-establish a family home and described by Hasted in about 1780 as having "the size and stateliness full sufficient for a gentleman's residence". 4 reception rooms, 7 bedrooms, 4 en suite bathrooms, family bathroom, kitchen, 2 further rooms, storerooms, domestic offices, cloakrooms, extensive ground floor rooms. Stable block. Gardens and grounds with river frontage and island. About 6 1/2 acres. POA