

SHERBROOKE

FN 4929

Estate that was built on pills

YOU might call it a house built upon aches.

The number of aches in the world at any one time is staggering, and the house is larger than life, Gargantua in the Dandenongs.

We refer to Burnham Beeches, the estate established by Alfred Nicholas in the early 1930s. Nicholas and his younger brother George became rich by making and marketing the pain-quelling pill called Aspro.

Later the company diversified into other pharmaceutical products and expanded internationally.

For many years now, Burnham Beeches has served as a base for product research for the Nicholas company, and it would be difficult to find more idyllic working conditions.

For dedicated joggers, there are the grounds in which to practise their weird ritual, and the quiet Sherbrooke roads. For swimmers, there is a large covered pool.

This is hardly the sort of thing you would want in your back yard; it is about 14 metres long and about six metres wide, it has a great deal of tiling and plenty of edge room. Its building has large windows, and it is heated by an inconspicuous system widely used throughout the house.

This consists of metal wall plates with hot water pipes welded to them so that they are invisible.

Incidentally, there is no need to venture into the Sherbrooke wintertime chill to get

from house to pool; there is wide passage that extends under a bed of camellias to connect house and pool.

Burnham Beeches also was graced with a theatre and a squash court, both at the moment used for other purposes.

Similarly, a large solarium at the top of the house is now used as a conference room — although the view of the gardens is so compelling that it might be hard to concentrate on graver matters.

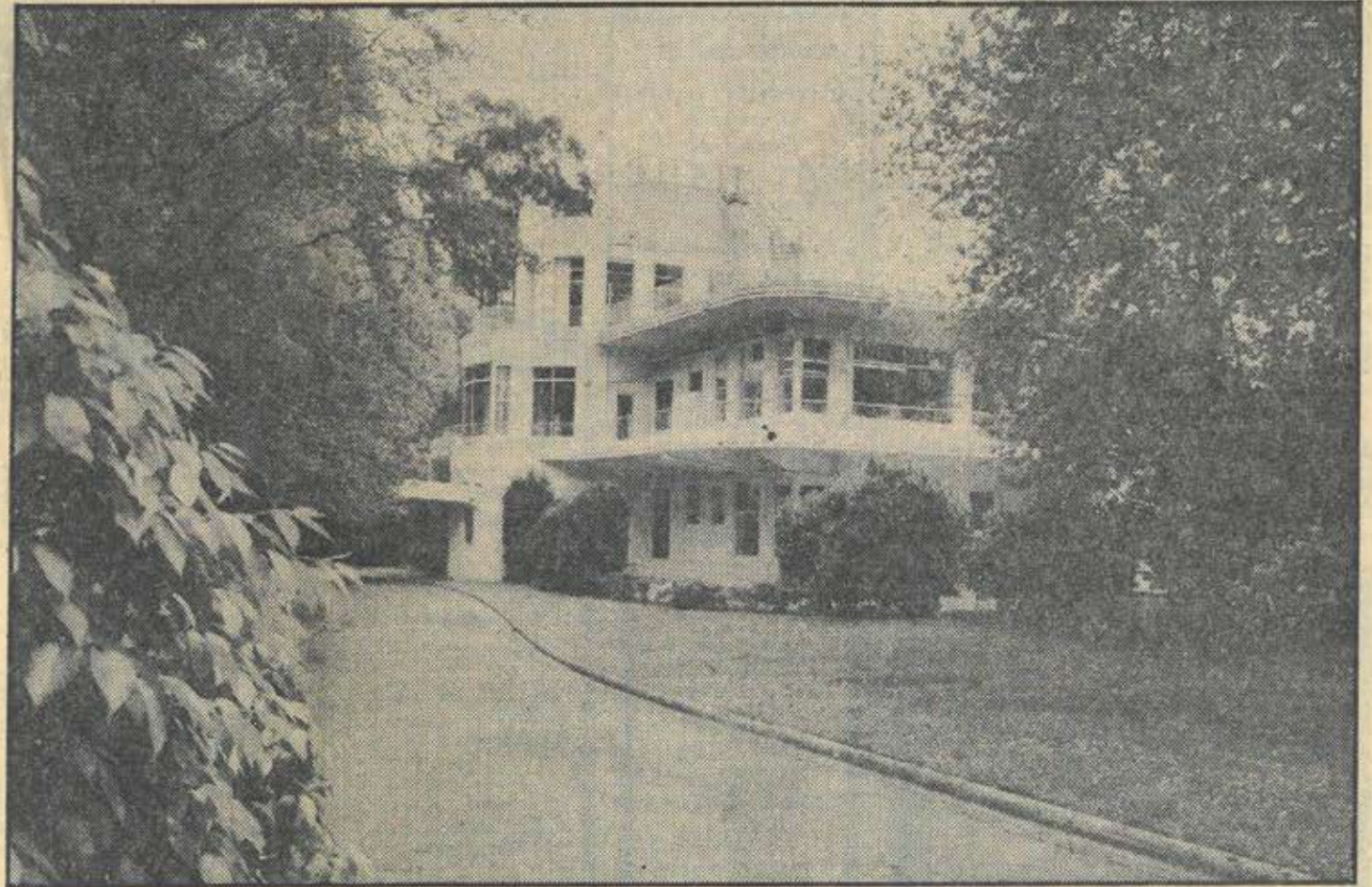
Similarly, there is a superb view from the former drawingroom, although, in common with other rooms, this has been temporarily diminished in size by partitions. The original house had something like 20 rooms.

When we get down to the former servants' quarters on the lowest level, the views are less striking, and rooms smaller, although still generous by comparison with servants' quarters in many other houses of the immediate pre-World-War II period.

But even down here the solidity of the house, which is of reinforced concrete, is apparent, and the workmanship in the maple doors is good, if less fancy. Most of the main doors are dovetailed.

Even the lift, which goes from ground to third floor, has fine timber in the rather showy Hollywood style in which the house is built.

The main staircase is in the same tradition, with an ambulatory that runs around the stair hall at a higher level and gives still more views of the gardens.



Even the nearby kitchen, with its hotel-type fittings, has a garden view, and outside the windows of the nearby diningroom a huge mauve rhododendron is in full glory.

The vast main bedrooms, with their almost equally vast adjoining sunrooms, their en suites and dressingrooms have their fill of garden views too.

These gardens are in fine condition; they are blessed with lawns, rhododendrons, camellias and azaleas, and a thousand other

shrubs and trees — the mountain ashes, for example, that seem bent on reaching the sky.

There is a well-kept tennis court, and the site of another, and the site of a croquet lawn near hot houses. There are what almost look like stables as well as true stables.

The stables that look like stables but are not were once quarters for St Bernard dogs bred by a member of the Nicholas family

There are various other buildings, including four cottages and a garage with

space, so the story goes, for six Rolls-Royces in two rows of three.

All this is set in 22.76 hectares of rolling countryside that includes open paddocks where cattle graze.

The estate covered much more land, but the neighboring Alfred Nicholas Gardens were excised and given to the Shire of Sherbrooke.

K. Gardner & Lang of Kew will auction Burnham Beeches at 2.30 pm on Friday 27 November.