

18 John Street, Kew

'Glastonbury', which has occupied the north-east corner of John and Alfred Streets for 95 years has recently been sold.

Designed for Ernest and Amy Robinson and their family by the architect John Stevens Gawler in 1917 on land that was once part of the Dumaresq estate, the house remained in their family for 55 years.

A second family purchased it in 1972 and lived there happily for a further 40 years, during which time some additions were made to the rear of the house. Apart from that, little has changed in all that time.

I visited there frequently as a child in the 1940s and clearly remember the warmth of its paneled walls and its quirky nooks and crannies and inventive arts and crafts details.

Aunt Amy made attractive floor rugs from hessian and strips of coloured cloth. The fabric was looped through the hessian with a special hook to form the design. She designed garments for the family's sportswear business and decorated the cakes for her family's weddings and collected pewter and old English furniture.

Amy Elizabeth, as she was known, belonged to many charitable organisations, and worked for them all - the Country Women's Association, Red Cross, Comforts Fund, and the St. George's Hospital Building Appeal.

During the dark days of the war, the house became a centre for the making of camouflage nets and papier-mache bowls for field dressings. It was always a happy home with people coming and going, keen to take part in all of these activities and always made to feel welcome, until when on one dark wet night as she was crossing Cotham Road, a taxi knocked her down.

The back garden still contains the laundry and garage as outbuildings, although the garden is somewhat reduced due to extensions to the house. There used to be a large grassed area with fruit trees along the side fences where beautiful juicy apples grew, and a fishpond and aviary and a solidly constructed swing in the centre of the lawn area, which was strong enough to accommodate swingers of all ages.

There was also a fenced vegetable garden where the pet magpie reigned. At the sound of the latch on the side gate, he would call out, "Are you there, Mrs. Robbie?" in imitation of the tradesmen who would call at that time.

