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**‘PRISON WITHOUT BARS’ PLAN ALARMS COUNCILS**

**23 August 1952**

10

**Strong protests likely at choice of site near town**

A proposal for the setting up of a “prison without bars” in the vicinity of Knaresborough is understood to be causing much concern to both Knaresborough Urban Council and Nidderdale Rural Council, and it is likely that this concern will spread to Harrogate.

No official confirmation has been forthcoming of the news, learned this week, that both authorities have been informed of the proposal by the Prison Commissioners, but it is believed that neither Council will omit to register a strong protest against the  
20 establishment of such a prison in a district noted for its scenic beauty and its attractiveness for visitors.

As yet there are no official indications as to the site of the proposed prison, but it is thought that its nearness to Knaresborough will also involve a comparative nearness to Harrogate.

**Protest petition?**

Local authority action on the matter will have to await meetings of Knaresborough Urban Council on September 6<sup>th</sup>, and of Nidderdale Rural Council on September  
30 10<sup>th</sup>. It is expected that there will be a call for a public inquiry, and it is also likely that the authorities most intimately concerned will sponsor a petition of protest. It was confirmed this week that no intimation of the proposal has been received by Harrogate Corporation.

## Spa prisoners?

10 News that a plan has been drawn up for the establishment of a “prison without bars” in the vicinity of Harrogate will doubtless come as a shock to all who have the interests of the town and neighbouring countryside at heart. Why no earlier intimation of the intention was made is a question which will probably never be answered. Indeed, even now, the local authorities concerned find themselves unable to give the public a clear lead in the matter.

The desire that no detailed information should be released until there has been a full meeting of both Knaresborough Urban and Nidderdale Rural Councils can be respected, but it is not necessarily accepted. Ministerial activity is not always slow. Events can take place swiftly behind the scenes. In matters such as this there is a grave danger of local residents being presented with a fait accompli.

Urban and rural taxpayers now desire urgently to know the proposed location of the prison. How near to Harrogate will it be established? In everyone’s mind is the perturbing knowledge that a number of escapes have been made from these “prisons without bars” in the past few years.

20 Many people will also want to know why this district has been chosen for such a scheme. A good class residential area, of great scenic attraction and popular with thousands of visitors, would appear to the layman to be most unsuitable in every way. The average man, as distinct from the Ministerial “planner” would expect a less populous area to provide a more suitable site for the purpose.

There is no doubt that these views will ultimately find strong expression. Whether they will be given a sympathetic hearing by the national authority responsible for the proposed prison is uncertain. But the people of Knaresborough and Nidderdale, with the backing of Harrogate, will have a great deal to say before they accept the official view that their countryside should house a prison.

## **SPA LIKELY TO SUPPORT PRISON PROTEST**

**30 August 1952**

### **Scriven Park plan obviously unsettling, says Ald. Bolland**

10 This week's disclosure that Scriven Park is the site selected by the Prison Commissioners for a "prison without bars" in the Knaresborough area has added point to the anxiety of Nidderdale Rural Council that it should have the support of Harrogate Town Council and Knaresborough Urban Council in the strenuous protests it is making against the plan.

Opposition is also being prepared on behalf of Scotton Banks Sanatorium. Scriven Park lies just within the Nidderdale district on the boundary of the Urban Council's area and adjoins the Ripley Road, a popular communication with Harrogate. On the other side of Ripley road, situated in a comparatively lonely area, is the Scotton Banks Hospital.

It seems likely that Harrogate Town Council will agree to add the protests to those of the other authorities.

20

### **People "might be put off"**

Yesterday, Ald. Harry Bolland, leader of the Town Council, told a staff reporter that although the Council had not had an opportunity of discussing the matter, he thought that members would be prepared to support the Knaresborough and Nidderdale Councils.

30 "In a town like Harrogate, which attracts a higher proportion than normal of elderly residents, it would be obviously unsettling to have a prison of this kind so near. People who might wish to come here as residents could easily be put off when they learned of the nearness of the prison site. Though I cannot speak in advance of what the Council might decide, I should think the members would see the matter from that point of view and would be willing to help the Knaresborough people in their protests."

Ald. C. Jack Simpson, of Harrogate, who is chairman of the House Committee of Scotton Banks Hospital, is to make strong protests through the Harrogate and Ripon Hospital Management Committee and the Leeds Regional Board.

His view, based on the limited information so far available, is that “the site would be highly undesirable” as far as the sanatorium is concerned.

### **“Lonely walk” for staff**

10 “It is rather a lonely walk for female staff from Knaresborough to Scotton, especially in the evening, and I am sure that they would take very strong objection. The problems of staffing such a large sanatorium are difficult enough already and they would become worse with a prison so near. I shall certainly take the matter up with the Management Committee, and hope that the Leeds Regional Board will conduct strong opposition to the scheme.”

Exclusive reports in the Harrogate Press last week gave the first intimation to the public of the prison without bars plan. At an emergency meeting of Nidderdale Rural Council on Wednesday, the Chairman, Capt. W. H. Featherston, referring to the immediate protest made by three members of the Council, said that in discussions with the Harrogate Press he had felt that the location of the proposed site should not be disclosed until the full Council had met.

### **No time lost**

20

The Harrogate Press, he said, had abided loyally by his wishes, but unfortunately the location had been divulged since. He was therefore, anxious to stress that no time had been lost in lodging an objection to the Prison Commissioners’ proposal.

The Rural Council has already met to discuss the situation as an emergency matter, and the subject will be prominent on the agenda of Knaresborough Urban Council’s meeting on Monday.

Harrogate invited

30 Mr F. Rogers, Clerk to the Nidderdale Council, told a reporter this week that invitations were to be sent both to the Urban Council of Knaresborough and to Harrogate Town Council for a joint meeting of the three authorities. First, however, the members of the Nidderdale Council intended to hear the views of the Area Planning Officer on the scheme. These will be discussed at the Rural Council’s next meeting on September 10<sup>th</sup>.

Villagers of ole-world Scriven are unanimously against the scheme and are prepared to back a petition against it.

## The Prison

Most of the questions we asked in this column last week have been answered. The site of the proposed “prison without bars” is Scriven camp on the very borders of Knaresborough. It has been chosen because it is, apparently, one of the few already requisitioned camps which are suitable and available for the purpose.

10 “Very carefully selected” prisoners will be sent there, and most of them will work within the boundaries of the camp. Some will be employed on neighbouring farms under supervision.

That is the full information on which Nidderdale Rural Council has lodged an early protest. It is anticipated that Knaresborough Urban Council will decide to act on parallel lines when the proposal is considered at the monthly meeting on Monday. There are signs, too, that Harrogate is watching developments with close attention and may be prepared to support the action of those local authorities most intimately concerned.

20 There is every indication that public opinion is against the establishment of a prison, whatever its nature, close to a residential area, but there may some who feel the inadequacy of protests in affairs governed so largely by remote control. If “they” have decided to put a prison at Scriven, people ask helplessly, what can we do about it?

The answer is that every democratic means of protest must be used to the full. In particular, an attempt should be made to secure a public inquiry into the proposal, and perhaps the best way of achieving this is, as a correspondent suggests, by calling a Town Meeting in Knaresborough.

When Scriven Hall and estate were first requisitioned the country faced a desperate emergency. The nation’s need was the paramount consideration. It would have been unthinkable for local people to object that a prisoner-of-war camp spoiled their amenities.

30 To-day it should be equally absurd to argue that Scriven estate has what the planning experts call an “existing use” as a prison camp. In other words, the accident of war-time requirements should not prejudice Knaresborough and Nidderdale’s case that Scriven is an unsuitable area for a prison from several points of view.

## CORRESPONDENCE COLUMN

6 September 1952

### PRISON WITHOUT BARS

Sir

May I state the view of the apparent minority in this discussion?

10

The facts against the prison being in Knaresborough are considered “logically unassailable.” What are these facts? What is supreme logic is that these prisoners have to be accommodated somewhere and if every community rejected them where would they go?

Wherever they go there will be children in the near vicinity – so that point is not “unassailable.”

Presumably, Knaresborough is too “good” for such people. In that case it is obviously the best place for them. Give them lovely surroundings and a good neighbourly community of people who have, apparently, never themselves been so  
20 sorely tempted or have, themselves, had kinder parents and a better environment and the good example and higher atmosphere should permeate the prison.

These men have “fallen by the wayside.” Do not let us fail to be good Samaritans in thought and outlook. It is easy to let the Straffen affair give us an emotional unbalance and prejudice in this respect.

As far as the Hospital is concerned – this is the only logic put forward – but – it hangs on the supposition that the men are brutal assaulters who will be permitted to hang around lonely lanes at all hours of the night. Surely this is erroneous?

30 As far as we know these men will be short-term prisoners, are of good morale, and will be taking their place again as social citizens. Let us not embitter them by our attitude, but encourage them to become good citizens by friendly compassion.

Yours –

M.B.

Knaresborouogh.

## **NEWS ITEM**

### **M.P. TO ASK HOME SECRETARY ABOUT PRISON PLAN**

#### **Knaresborough Urban Council supports protest**

10

Mr Christopher York, M.P. for the Harrogate Division, said this week that he intended to get in touch with the Home Secretary as soon as possible to obtain more information about the “prison without bars” which it is proposed to establish at Scriven camp.

He made it clear that he wishes to know the full facts behind the proposal before taking any action, but he told a staff reporter: “It does seem to me to be a bit of a risk bringing this experiment so close to town.”

Mr York said on Thursday that he did not think such prisons were ineffective.

20 In the small village of Askham Richard, only a few miles from his home at Long Marston, there was a prison without bars for women, Askham Grange.

During the six years since the prison was founded, there had been no complaints from the villagers about the conduct of the prisoners. The existence of the prison was now taken for granted.

Mr York explained that Askham seemed to be the ideal place for a prison. It was isolated and was quiet. There were no attractions to unsettle the prisoners.

In this respect it was very different from Knaresborough, a thriving holiday resort and market centre.

Mrs York a member of the visiting committee of Askham Grange, endorsed her husband’s views.

30 She told a staff reporter on Thursday that the effectiveness of a prison depended on the governor to a large extent.

## Joint campaign

On Monday, Knaresborough Urban Council welcomed the suggestion for a joint meeting with representatives of Harrogate Town Council and Nidderdale Rural Council, to plan a vigorous “No prison near Knaresborough” campaign. Five members were nominated to attend on behalf of the Knaresborough authority.

10 It was also agreed that County Coun. A. C. Crowther, who represents the Knaresborough Division on the West Riding County Council, and a representative of the Harrogate and Ripon Hospital Management Committee, which controls Scotton Banks Sanatorium, should be asked to be present.

Members expressed their objections to the proposal by the Prison Commissioners, and the Clerk (Mr W. E. Brown) read a number of letters of protest from local residents.

Coun. E. C. Wilkinson, who lives within a quarter of a mile of Scriven camp, said his first reaction to the news of the prison proposal was that it was “absolutely scandalous and horrifying.” On reflection, he considered it “ridiculous.”

He knew the district concerned and he felt the Prison Commissioners did not. In their objections they must hit hard.

20 There was always opposition to a proposal to establish a prison in any district. The authorities were used to “normal protestations,” and the town was undoubtedly up against a tough proposition.

An amazing number of old people, widows and single women lived alone within the residential area close to the camp. He knew that they were already frightened at the prospect.

## 99 per cent against

30 he had been approached by a number of citizens, and there was no doubt that 99 per cent of the population was definitely disturbed at the proposal.

Knaresborough was a beauty spot and a holiday resort. People did not like spending their holidays in the vicinity of a prison.

He suggested that in addition to planning a course of action in consultation with the neighbouring authorities, the support of the Division's Member of Parliament should be sought.

Pointing out the effect which the close proximity of a prison would have on the nurses at Scotton Banks Sanatorium, Coun. Ernest Jackson said that the Hospital Management Committee already experienced difficulty in obtaining staff.

10 "We have had experience of the ex-enemy prisoners-of-war housed at Scriven Camp" he went on. "They were supposed to be under the same supervision and guard as that at a prison without bars, and I know the results of that sort of thing."

Coun. H. T. Knutton agreed that only unusual and very strong objections would be likely to sway the Prison Commissioners. Their outlook would be vastly different from that of the people of Knaresborough.

Were there, he wondered, prisons in any other part of the country as close to a town as Scriven camp? The geographical situation for a prisoner to escape was ideal. That "temptation" would not be as great if the prison were established further away from main roads.

20 Coun. G. Hughes was not unmindful of the difficulties of the Prison Commissioners, but it did seem to him that the shortage of prison accommodation was being tackled in the wrong way. In addition to the one at Knaresborough, it was proposed to establish a similar prison in a Lake district beauty spot. To him that was all wrong.

### **Danger to patients**

Coun. R. R. Allan stressed the danger which a prison would bring to the patients at Scotton Banks Sanatorium, mostly women and girls, who slept in open rooms.

Coun. P. Broadbelt considered the "beauty spot" objection not strong enough. "We are totally opposed to a prison at all in Knaresborough," he declared.

30 He thought one of the most effective objections would be that relating to the Sanatorium. That should be one of the main planks in their platform. The town's attitude should be "no prison at Knaresborough if we can possibly avoid it."

The Chairman (Coun. G. A. Holch) said he felt that Knaresborough Urban Council was more intimately concerned in the proposed development than Nidderdale Rural Council. He revealed that the Harrogate and Ripon Hospital Management Committee has already lodged a direct protest against the prison proposal.

The Chairman (Coun. G. A. Holch), vice-chairman (Coun. W. Emmett) and Couns. P. Broadbelt, Ernest Jackson and E. C. Wilkinson were appointed to attend the joint meeting of the three local authorities.

### **Protest at Wakefield**

The scheme was also strongly opposed by County Alderman J. S. Tennant (Harrogate) during a meeting of the West Riding County Council Health Committee in Wakefield on Monday.

- 10 **Footnote:** at next Wednesday's meeting members of Nidderdale Rural Council will hear the views of the Area Planning officer on the prison scheme.

## **CORRESPONDENCE COLUMN**

**13 September 1952**

### **SCRIVEN PARK PRISON**

Sir

- 20 How good it was to see in your issue of September 6<sup>th</sup> that there is at least one Christian person in Knaresborough. "M.B." has sounded a note which should have been ringing in the hearts of all professing Christians. Surely it is the duty of Christians to take in strangers whoever they are, to help the unfortunate however deeply they have sinned. If we suffer in the process well and good. Our Lord suffered for us and for those who may be sent to Scriven.

It would appear that to most people business and money grubbing comes before love and compassion, that security comes before eternal salvation, that bodily safety comes before the saving of immortal souls.

- 30 To consider hard facts – is it likely that dangerous offenders will be sent to a "prison without bars?" Does not the popularity of Dartmoor show that a prison attracts tourists, admittedly for sordid motives. There has been a colony for mental defectives at Whixley for a long time and no harm has come to anyone.

The reaction of the general public to this proposal is only another instance of how far our country has fallen into the depths of selfish paganism. The reaction of Christian people should be: here is a grand opportunity to bring the love and charity of the Master into the lives of people who need His help through us.

Yours -

G. A. Potter

The Vicarage

Aldborough

10 Sir

There have been some very sound arguments adduced in support of the righteous opposition to this iniquitous proposal.

It will require logical reasons and a complete upsurge of public opinion if we are to succeed in our objections. The liberties our fathers fought for since Simon de Montfort's days are being slowly but surely taken from us. The liberty of the subject and the right of appeal by individual or community are becoming a hollow farce.

The fact is that these so-called "Ministries" are nothing short of juggernauts waxing fat on the poor mortals they succeed in crushing.

20 I have no fresh evidence or reason to bring forward to strengthen the case for appeal, but I would like to refute one argument which the Ministry or County Council will assuredly stress: i.e. the inability to find alternative accommodation. I refuse to accept this.

I get about a good deal and know that Service huts are available in derelict or partly derelict aerodromes and camps at the present moment. If that statement can be questioned, surely new Army or Nissen huts could be erected quickly on these camps or near, where any runaways could be more quickly dealt with by assistance from the Services.

Yours –

30 Arthur H. Kitching

"Runnymede"

Ripley Road

Knaresborough

## NEWS ITEM

### DEMAND FOR INQUIRY INTO PRISON SCHEME

#### Local authorities unanimous at Knaresborough meeting

10 If the Prison Commissioners intend to proceed with their project to establish a “prison without bars” on Scriven Park Estate, Knaresborough, a public inquiry should be held before any practical steps are taken.

This was the unanimous view expressed at a joint meeting in Knaresborough yesterday, attended by representatives of Harrogate Town Council, Nidderdale Rural Council, Knaresborough Urban Council, Harrogate and Ripon Hospital Management Committee, and other bodies.

Coun. P. Broadbelt, Knaresborough Urban Council, said that the meeting was entirely in agreement with all the views expressed that afternoon, and supported Nidderdale Rural Council in its objection.

20 Newspaper reporters were excluded from the meeting after representatives from various bodies had objected to their being present.

The meeting was convened by Nidderdale Rural Council, and Capt. W. H. Featherston presided. Representing Harrogate Town Council were the Major, Coun. A. V. Milton, and Ald. C. Jack Simpson, who was also representing the House Committee administering Scotton Banks Sanatorium.

Leeds General Hospital Board decided at its meeting in Harrogate on Thursday to investigate the protests against the proposal to set up a “prison without bars” at Scriven. The General Purposes Committee is to seek more information about the proposals, and to report back to the Board.

30 The secretary, Mr W. A. Shee, read a letter from Ald. C. Jack Simpson, a member of the Harrogate and Ripon Hospital Management Committee.

“I have hears with some alarm” wrote Ald. Simpson, “of the projected ‘prison without bars.’ I cannot help feeling that our staffing problem, difficult as it already is, can be made even worse if this project is carried through.

“Our girls already dislike very much walking from Knaresborough in the dark, which they sometimes have to do. One can well imagine their feelings under the new conditions.

“Of course, I know little about these places as yet, and therefore am not really in a position to judge. But I do think that we should put in a strong objection from the Sanatorium, and a demand that our position be fully investigated before anything is done.”

10 Major J. C. Hunter, chairman of Harrogate and Ripon Hospital Management Committee, said the Scotton Banks Sanatorium was not protected by a high wall or fence, merely by a hedge, and emphasised that the prison would be only half to three-quarters of a mile away.

There were several unpleasant incidents during the time the Displaced Persons camp was at Scriven, he said.

“All this is bound to have a psychological effect on the patients, and it is bound to have an effect on the staffing of the Sanatorium,” said Major Hunter. “I think we should make strong protests against the scheme.”

20 Mrs I. B. Shaw, of York, said that only one person had ever walked out of the “prison without bars” near Askham Richard. “I think such an institution is more desirable than a camp for displaced persons,” she said. “ – that is, if it is for women. I don’t know about men.”

A member said he had heard that the Scriven prison was to house debtors.

Commented Ald. D. Beevers: “I hope it will be made comfortable for them.”

## **CORRESPONDENCE COLUMN**

**27 September 1952**

### **NO “TRIFLING” THINGS**

30 Sir

I cannot understand the attitude of Mr Abbott, who last week referred to people “2sentenced” to prison sentences “for some trifling thing that thousands do without being caught” and also to those “unluckily caught in some small intrigue.” If Mr

Abbott had ever visited police courts he would soon realise that prison sentences are imposed only in extreme cases.

Mr Abbott's generalisations veer dangerously from the truth. "Thousands" are surely not in the habit of deliberately challenging the law to such an extent that they render themselves liable to imprisonment. This continual over-sympathetic view towards crime can be regarded only as an unsavoury fillip to the criminal himself.

Yours –

C. W. Moncrieff

13 Spring Grove

10 Harrogate

### REPLY TO MR ABBOTT

Sir

I read with interest the letter by Mr B. P. Abbott, which was regarding the proposed Scriven Park prison, because I happen to be one of the narrow-minded critics who are mentioned.

It is not that we disagree with the idea of a prison without bars, but after all, as Mr Abbott says, Knaresborough is a holiday resort.

20 If such a prison were instigated, it would be very close to two residential districts. Even though 95 per cent of the prisoners are not hardened criminals, there is, invariably, the "black sheep of the family."

Surely a more suitable site could be found for such a prison.

Yours –

Michael R. Waddington

"Durley House"

Lands Lane

Knaresborough

## **No prison**

**4 October 1952**

Authority has wisely decided to abandon its ill-conceived plan to establish a "prison without bars" at Scriven Camp near Knaresborough.

First and foremost the result is a triumph for those who adhere to the theory of regional autonomy. As one man the elected representatives of the people declared their abhorrence of the prison scheme. Founded on local knowledge and backed by local opinion, their cause was just, and it has succeeded.

10 These strong objections are a vindication of the view, often expressed in this column, that centralised authority too frequently fails to ascertain the wishes of those people most closely affected by its actions. It is too early yet to say whether or not the outcome of the protests is an indication of any complete reversal of Ministerial policy in this direction. But it is reasonable to conclude that the present political climate is more favourable towards freedom of action for local governments, and freedom from arbitrary imposition by higher authorities, than it has been in the past few years.

Whatever the implications of the change of mind, however, the Home Secretary has won friends among those who believe that the voice of the small community is to be as much respected as the clamour of the millions.

20

## **NEWS ITEM**

### **HOME OFFICE ABAONDONS THE SCRIVEN PRISON PLAN**

#### **Letter to Mr C. York tells of success of opposition**

There will be no "prison without bars" at Scriven Camp.

30 A letter from the Home Secretary, received by Mr Christopher York, M.P. for the Harrogate Division, on Thursday, stated: "It has now been decided not to proceed with this plan." No reason was given.

The local authorities concerned, who have conducted a spirited resistance to the scheme, have not yet been officially informed that it has been abandoned. The news came as a pleasant surprise.

Capt. W. H. Featherston, Chairman of Nidderdale Rural Council, which registered a strong objection with the Prison Commissioners within 24 hours of being informed of the prison plan, told a staff reporter he was convinced that the protests made by his authority, together with Knaresborough and Harrogate, must have had an important bearing on the Home Secretary's decision.

10 He added: "There is no doubt that if we had not taken it up as vigorously as we did, the prison would have been established in a very short time. As it was, I had great hopes that the plan would be abandoned".

Coun. G. A. Holch, Chairman of Knaresborough Urban Council, said the news came as a complete surprise to him, because he had feared the project had gone too far to be stopped.

### **Respect the individual**

20 "It shows that there is a certain amount of respect still left for the freedom of the individual," he declared. "When representations are made so strongly, there is an opportunity of achieving the apparently impossible."

Brigadier G. S. Brunskill, of Scriven, who has taken a leading part in the public protests, described the news as conveying "a very genuine and sincere relief from the state of anxiety and even fear which has been created among Scriven villagers and other local residents."

### **SCRIVEN HALL TO BE HANDED BACK**

**25 October 1952**

30

### **Sequel to abandoned prison plan**

Scriven Hall, it is understood, is to be handed back to the owners, the Slingsby Estate, by the Ministry of works. The Hall and estate were requisitioned by the War

Office early in the war. Less than a month ago, the Home Office abandoned, in the face of local opposition, a plan to establish a “prison without bars” at the camp.

It is understood that the hall will be de-requisitioned in the near future and the unsightly huts, which once housed prisoners of war and later European voluntary workers, removed. This step was foreshadowed in the “Knaresborough Post” when the abandonment of the prison plan was reported.

10 The aim of the owners is now believed to be the preservation of an historic hall, built partly in the Elizabethan style, which has suffered greatly in appearance from its war and post-war use. It is feared, however, that it will never again be suitable as a residence for a member of the Slingsby family, whose connection with Scriven dates back more than 600 years, or for a tenant like the late Sir Algernon Firth.

The hall was first leased by the late Sir Eric Geddes, after the death, following a hunting accident, of the Rev. Charles Henry Reynard Slingsby, father of the present life-owner, Major T. W. Slingsby, who lives at Northallerton.

### **Not for sale**

20 Brigadier G. S. Brunskill, agent to the estate, said this week: “We are confident that a good, quiet use can be found for the hall, especially as it is so beautifully situated without there being extensive gardens or grounds to maintain.”

Brigadier Brunskill revealed that the intention will be not to sell the hall, but to offer it on a long-term lease. The surrounding estate is already used as farmland.

Possible suitable uses for the hall include instructional courses, care of handicapped or elderly people, or offices. It would appear to be most suitable for leasing to a public body.

## **FIREMEN PREPARE FOR ALL-NIGHT VIGIL AT SCRIVEN**

**20 December 1952**

30 **West wing of Hall gutted in big blaze: “The last tragedy”**

Firemen were late yesterday afternoon preparing for a night-long vigil at Scriven Hall, near Knaresborough, the west wing of which was completely gutted by fire early in the morning.

Although the blaze was under control within three hours of the arrival of Fire Services from Knaresborough, Harrogate and Leeds, smoke was still pouring from the windows and roof late yesterday, and timber, charred and twisted, was intermittently crashing to the floor, already piled high with rubble.

It was also noticed that a main gable end was sagging precariously, and it was feared that the outside walls of the west wing would collapse. Last night, however, this seemed unlikely.

10 Divisional-Officer T. J. Edgar, of Harrogate, told a staff reporter yesterday that the dense fog probably prevented the fire from being discovered earlier than it was. As it happened, shortly after six yesterday morning, Mrs Harry Clapham, of the nearby Home Farm, Scriven, saw a "red glow" in the sky above the hall.

### **Huge flames**

Her husband raised the alarm, and Knaresborough firemen were on the spot within 20 minutes. He told a staff reporter: "When I got to the scene, the firemen were already there, and huge, licking flames were towering through the roof, which had then caved in." Later, reinforcements arrived from Harrogate and Leeds.

20 But fog was not the only hazard. Firemen soon discovered that the water pressure at Scriven was too low to be effective, and hoses had to be run nearly 2,000 yards to the lake close by. This held up extinguishing work for a time, because ice had to be broken on the lake.

Brigadier G. S. Brunskill, Scriven Estate agent, was on the spot at 6.30am. he told a staff reporter: "If only the pressure had not been so low, more of the hall might have been saved." Brigadier Brunskill described the blaze as "the last tragedy in a series of tragedies which the hall has suffered."

### **Disappointment**

30

He went on: "It has been a special disappointment, after we had been successful in persuading the Home Office to drop their prison-without-bars scheme."

Altogether, 35 firemen fought the blaze. The building is 180ft by 60ft, and three floors high. There are 50 rooms and the mansion is partly built in Elizabethan style.

At about mid-day, firemen spotted more unsuspected flames, fanned by the wind, and hosepipes were playing again. But these were not considered serious, although they caused more timber beams to crash to the floor.

Scriven Hall was unoccupied and contained no furniture.

### **East wind helped**

10 Fireman succeeded in confining the outbreak to the wet wing, where the blaze was extremely fierce. An east wind probably helped to keep the flames to that end of the building.

Scriven Hall was about to be derequisitioned, but had not yet been handed back to the owners.

On the instructions of the Ministry of Works, men have been working on the interior, dealing with dry rot. They left yesterday at five pm, having doused a fire which they had lit in one of the fireplaces. They locked the building before leaving.

It is understood that there was no watchman on the premises.

### **Undamaged**

20 Undamaged, near the rear door, was a wooden sign with faded lettering: "24<sup>th</sup> German P.W. Satellite Camp," – a reminder of Scriven Hall's war-time use.

Scriven Hall and estate were requisitioned by the War office early in the war. The estate was occupied by the military and then became a camp for prisoners of war, and later for European voluntary workers.

The Scriven estate is owned by Major T. W. Slingsby, of Northallerton, who maintains a connection of the Slingsbys with Scriven dating back more than 600 years. The rolling parkland provides a perfect setting for the annual Knaresborough Show. The walls surrounding the estate form the boundary between the Knaresborough and Nidderdale administrative areas.

30 Scriven Hall stands on a rise at the end of the village, amid woodland, garden and parkland. The mansion, of which the late Sir Algernon Firth was the last occupant, is partly in the Elizabethan style, but has undergone many alterations and extensions.

The present front was added about 1730 by Sir Henry Slingsby, who also made the carriage road through the 400 acre park.

## SCRIVEN HALL BLAZE BEGAN IN CHIMNEY

27 December 1952

The fire which destroyed the west wing of Scriven Hall, near Knaresborough, originated in the chimney breast of the main hall. A thorough probe of the ruined building by forensic experts has satisfied the authorities that incendiarism can be ruled out as a cause of the blaze.

10 It is believed that sparks from a fire lighted by workmen in the fireplace of the main hall ignited an old beam in the false ceiling. From there the outbreak, after many hours of smouldering, spread to the whole of the west wing.

No blame or negligence is attributed to the workmen concerned, who were engaged on repair of the interior, prior to the hall being derequisitioned by the Ministry Works.

After the blaze had been brought under control on Friday morning, fireman maintained a 24-hour vigil over the smouldering rubble. Early on Saturday the brigades were withdrawn, leaving two men on watch.

Later the same day a minor outbreak among the charred timbers caused reinforcements to be hurried to the scene. The flames were soon extinguished.

### Hall's future

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Major T. W. Slingsby, of Northallerton, owner of the Scriven estate, visited the ruined hall on Sunday. He inspected the gutted west wing, which formerly houses the main residential rooms of the hall. The old servants' quarters are in the undamaged eastern portion of the hall.

Later this week, Brigadier G. S. Brunskill, agent to the Slingsby estate, said the future of Scriven Hall was extremely problematical. He emphasised that at the time of the fire the hall had not been handed back to the estate but was the responsibility of the Ministry of Works. He understood that the structure was insured against fire.

30 Recently, he said, the hall had been advertised for letting. "It was Major Slingsby's desire to preserve the historic building in this way," added Brigadier Brunskill, "and that desire still remains. The cost of re-building, however, is only one of the many factors to be considered.

