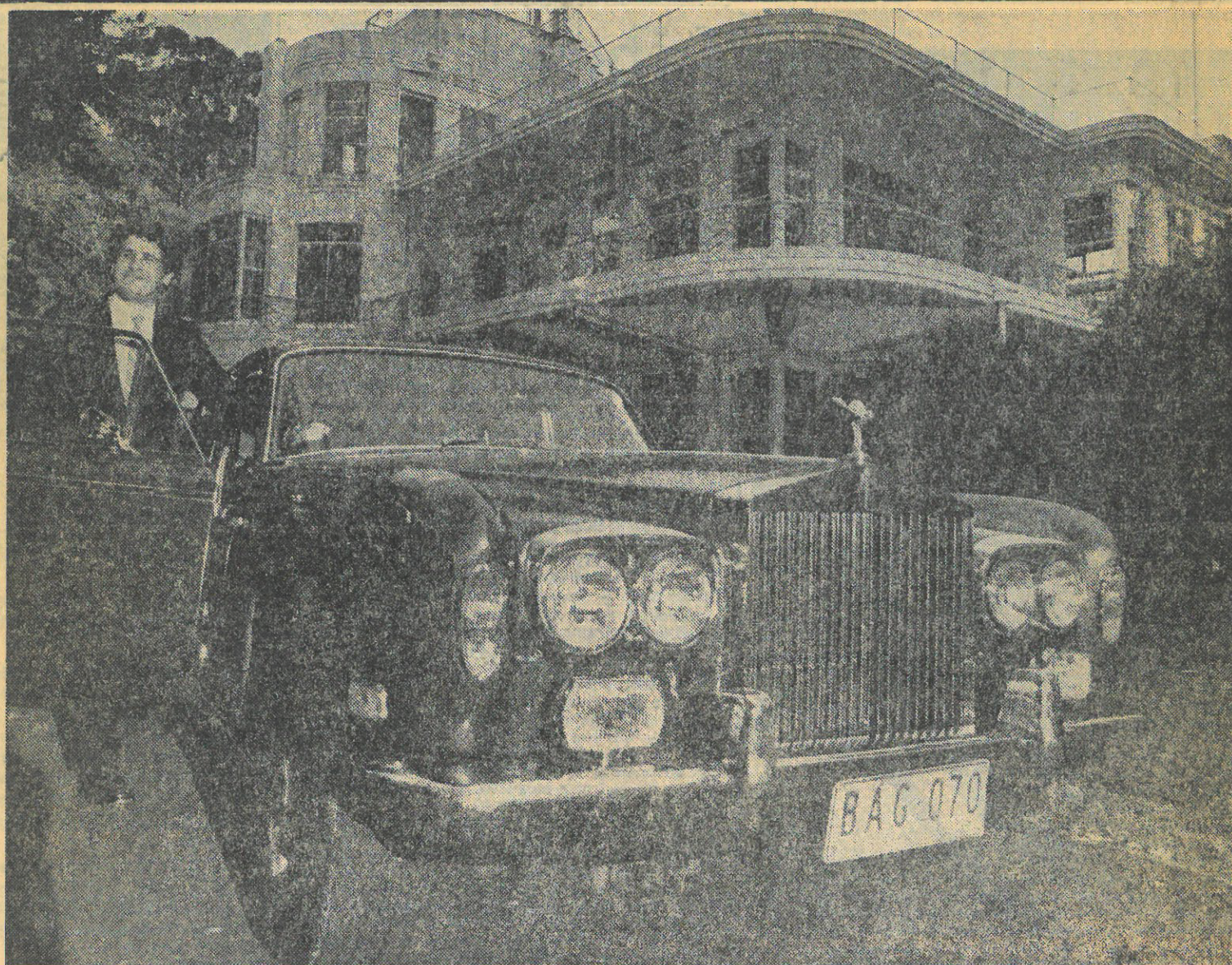


"Age"

6/5/82.

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By ALAN ATTWOOD

The auctioneer, Mr David Fowles, with the Rolls-Royce in the grounds of Burnham Beeches.

Picture: BRUCE POSTLE

In Sassafras on Saturday more than 50 years of family history will slip away from a reinforced concrete mansion, surrounded by a jumble of furniture, agricultural equipment, office fittings and one slightly used Rolls-Royce.

Burnham Beeches, the amazing Nicholas family mansion set in 23 hectares of gardens, has been sold. A clearance auction on Saturday will dispose of furniture and a vast range of equipment not required by the new owner or the Nicholas family — which has links with the property going back to 1930.

It was then that about 62 hectares of land was bought by Mr Alfred Nicholas, a brother of Mr George Nicholas — the one-time St Kilda chemist who developed Aspro into a multi-million dollar international company.

Mr Alfred Nicholas, who also worked in the company, had the Sassafras property landscaped and planted with trees, shrubs and orchids from all parts of the world. It is said he organised a ship from England to bring out specially chosen beech trees. Rhododendrons were planted so they would flower in sequence.

Trappings of the good life



This advertisement helped to make a fortune

The house itself, finished in 1933, is an enormous example of art deco architecture. There are four storeys, five including a solarium and upstairs terrace, a semi-circular mezzanine floor (called an ambulatory) around an open staircase with chrome fittings, and — the last word in kitsch — innumerable plaster possums and koalas set into the walls around the top terrace and along the walls of the enclosed swimming pool.

Mr Alfred Nicholas, his family, and about eight servants lived in the mansion until 1937, when Mr Nicholas died. But those last four years of his life were spent in considerable style. The master bedroom had adjacent sun, dress-

ing and bathrooms. The swimming pool was heated, and could be reached by a tunnel around the corner from the downstairs projection room. By the tennis court was a small pavilion with a fireplace. If the weather was inclement guests could amuse themselves in one of Australia's first squash courts.

Mr Maurice Nicholas — son of Mr Alfred Nicholas and chairman of the family business until 1976 — lived in the mansion as a teenager. After his father's death the family stayed for some time and then the house and property were refitted for use by the company for veterinary and medical research. In 1965 more than 12.5

hectares of the property was donated to Sherbrooke council for public use.

But the mansion and much of the land stayed in the family. Until recently the mansion has been used for research and development of Nicholas pharmaceuticals. Late last year it was sold to an unnamed private buyer who intends to develop the property into a private hotel and restaurant.

The Nicholas laboratories are being relocated at new premises in Boronia.

The Rolls-Royce — a blue Silver Shadow Series I model — belongs to a member of the Nicholas family who wishes to sell it. When the mansion was built the garage was apparently designed to fit six Rolls-Royces.

Saturday's auction, on the grounds of the property in Sherbrooke Road, will begin at 10 am. Those with a special interest in the Rolls-Royce should be there at noon. We should state that it is a clearance sale, not an open-day. But anyone passing by might wish to know that a polished wood ornamental lift, inside the mansion is well worth a look.