



**PROPOSED REMEDIAL REPAIR WORKS/MAKING-GOOD
TO THE SOUTHWEST (REAR) ELEVATION OF
THE SWISS COTTAGE (c.1840, Grade II Listed)**

ALTON TOWERS RESORT | ALTON | STAFFORDSHIRE



Conservation Design and Access Statement
incorporating a Heritage Statement

November 2021

ctd
architects

Clerk Bank House
Clerk Bank
LEEK
Staffordshire
ST13 5HE

tel: 01538 373 477
fax: 01538 386 503
info@ctdarchitects.co.uk
www.ctdarchitects.co.uk

RIBA 
Chartered Practice

Proposed Remedial Repair Works/Making-good to the Southwest (Rear) Elevation

CONTENTS

1.0	History & Statement of Significance	3
	History, Description, Significance & Summary Statement	
2.0	Conservation Philosophy	9
3.0	Design (Repair) Proposals	11
4.0	Design & Access Characteristics	12
5.0	Bibliography & References	13

1.0 HISTORY & STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE



Fig.1 Map of the gardens at Alton Towers with The Swiss Cottage highlighted (Source: Fisher, p.5)

History & Background:

The Swiss Cottage is owned by Merlin Entertainments as part of the Alton Towers Resort. The building is Grade II Listed and dates from 1835, and is one of 29 no. Listed structures within the Grade I Registered Gardens.

The building is located on the southeast fringe of the Listed Garden boundary and commands a prominent elevated position above the valley overlooking the terraces and Grand 'Garden' Conservatory and 'Gothic' Prospect Tower on the opposite side of the valley¹ (figs.1 & 4).

Built in a Tudor-Gothic style, for the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury, The Swiss Cottage is of constructed of orange brick with a local Hollington sandstone plinth and arched-head stone window and door frames. The steeply-pitched Staffordshire Blue plain clay tiled roof has a central sandstone octagonal chimney stack, with decorative cusped timber gable barge boards and eaves finial details. The 2-storey building has a symmetrical composition with a projecting front porch and entrance doorway (fig.2).

Uttoxeter builder-architect Thomas Fradgley, designed the original cottage with a thatched roof for which no known images remain, but the Talbot estate records show it was re-thatched in 1864 at a cost of £35.0. The current clay roof tile covering was added before the end of the 1800's.

The Swiss Cottage was designed primarily as a focal point in the gardens to be viewed from the north side terraces and to resemble an alpine lodge on the valley slopes. This intended view remains today as can be seen in the 1900's photo (fig.3).

¹ Richardson, p.23



Fig.2 The orange brick symmetrical composition of the north front elevation of The Swiss Cottage (Source: Alton Towers)



Fig.3 Postcard image of The Swiss Cottage looking southwards across the valley, circa 1900 (Source: Alton Towers Archive)

Built primarily as an aesthetic feature within the eclectic garden design scheme, The Swiss Cottage was originally occupied by a blind Welsh harpist called Edward Jervis. Jervis was employed by the 16th Earl to play on the terrace of the cottage and also behind the doors of the main house entrance on special occasions. This earned the cottage the nickname 'Harpers Cottages'.

Ironically, although the principal occupant of the cottage was blind, the view from the cottage terrace was probably among the most desirable with unrivalled views of

the gardens and in particular the Grand 'Garden' Conservatory, the Quarry Greenhouse 'Orangery', the 'Dutch Garden', Stonehenge, The Loggia, the 'Gothic' Prospect Tower and the 'Chinese' Pagoda Fountain, within this view (*fig.4*).



Fig.4 The view of the gardens from The Swiss Cottage looking northwards across the valley to the Loggia and Grand 'Garden' Conservatory, *circa* 1871. This view is now largely masked by mature trees (*Source: Alton Towers Archive*)

From the 1920's, when Alton Towers became a commercial venue, The Swiss Cottage was used as a tearoom and later a restaurant; its unrivalled location and view of the gardens obviously a major attraction (*fig.5*).

The Swiss Cottage was first Listed Grade II on 3/1/1967 in recognition of its integral relationship to the Grade I Registered Listed gardens, and its important contribution to this historic setting.

In the 1980's an extension was added to the southwest corner to create a more suitable entrance lobby (*fig.6*) and a large flat-roofed, commercial kitchen was also added to the southwest (rear) elevation, built up against the rock-faced embankment, so it could function as a restaurant.

The 'Swiss Cottage Restaurant' operated into the early 1990's.

In recent years it has been used for offices, storage and venue space, but now remains largely vacant, apart from storage over the winter months.



Fig.5 The Swiss Cottage Restaurant looking from the west with the popular terrace dining area in the late 1970's. Note the red and white striped canopy over the original single side door entrance before the construction of the southwest infill extension (Source: Alton Towers Archive)



Fig.6 The west elevation today with the 1980's southwest infill extension and new side entrance lobby (Source: ctd architects, 2020)



Fig.7 The south (rear) elevation looking from the southeast, following the removal of the modern flat-roofed kitchen extension in 2019. These are the elevations to be repaired and restored (Source: ctd architects, 2020)

In 2019, following the collapse of the modern felted flat roof to the rear kitchen extension, a decision was taken in conjunction with the local planning authority's conservation officer to remove the rear extension completely and to repair and restore the original rear elevation. The repair proposals are set out in this application for Listed Building Consent.

In order to prevent damage to the exposed rear of the cottage, the openings have been temporarily boarded for security and weather protection ahead of the proposed repair works.

Possible future uses for The Swiss Cottage include bringing it back into food and beverage use, as an estate office or possibly a museum of memorabilia, but there is currently no formal plan.

Historical Significance:

The Swiss Cottage occupies a prominent location in the Alton Towers theme park on the southeast edge of the historic gardens, elevated high above the valley, but with commanding views northerly across the key architectural garden buildings and terraces. This former picturesque cottage is visible to a great number of visitors to the theme park and acts as an important landmark and element of the layout and garden composition at Alton Towers.

The Swiss Cottage and its setting, within the nationally important historic gardens, is a significant *heritage asset*². Its historic and architectural *significance*³ is defined by both its age and its aesthetic. It is a good example of a 'Picturesque Gothick' folly in a highly significant setting. As a consequence of this significance any repairs or alterations to the site or building must be properly informed, appropriate and of a good quality.

Alton Towers is one of only three gardens within Staffordshire with a Grade I Listing. This is indicative of the importance of the gardens as a unique piece of 19th-century designed landscape.

The eclectic styles of the numerous, and separately Listed structures - including follies, grottos and monuments – were all carefully considered in their design and placement within the landscape. Cumulatively these buildings and structures bring additional *heritage value* to the gardens and contribute to its setting.

The Swiss Cottage also sits within the Alton & Farley Conservation Area and in a designated Special Landscape Area.

Summary:

The proposed reinstatement of the rear elevation door and window, and repair of the roof and masonry walls, will address the damage caused when the kitchen extension was added. These works will secure the building and restore heritage value and the original design intention.

The proposed works are sensitive and appropriate to the unique historic fabric and character of this nationally important *heritage asset*, and together with a programme of future maintenance, and ultimately the re-use of the building, will help to conserve, secure and enhance its *significance* for future generations to come.

² NPPF, p.67

³ *Ibid*, p.71

2.0 CONSERVATION PHILOSOPHY

Historic England define conservation as 'the process of managing change to a heritage asset and its setting in ways that will best sustain its *significance*, while taking opportunities to better reveal or enhance that significance for present and future generations'.⁴

'Conservation' in essence involves handing on to future generations what we value today. The process of conservation of a building must not stand in the way of change, but help to manage it in a positive and proactive way. The value, or 'significance' that we place on historic buildings distinguishes how important they are, and how they should be treated now and by future generations.⁵

Philosophy:

The general **conservation aim** of the proposed repair and restoration works to The Swiss Cottage *is to preserve and enhance the historic fabric as much as possible, whilst restoring, or 'recovering' lost architectural design features such as the rear doorway and window.*

Contributing to this aim the **conservation principles** to be adopted are;

- to maintain the historic and architectural integrity of the site and building;
- to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the historic fabric and it's setting;
- to employ appropriate conservation techniques in the reinstatement, repair and maintenance of historic fabric and theory;
- to restore only the elements that can be evidenced by historic design and that can be authentically reproduced using traditional and appropriate quality materials and traditional craft skills.

Policies:

In line with Historic England's **conservation policies** and guidance the principle and detailed repair specification and design of the proposed reinstated door and window have evolved from a policy of practical and 'informed conservation' - that is from an understanding and assessment of the history and importance of The 'Swiss Cottage to establish its heritage values and *significance* as a *heritage asset* in conservation terms.

The impact of the proposed repairs and reinstatement has in principle been considered so that it *preserves or enhances*, rather than detrimentally alters, the character and significance of the surviving structure and its setting through;

- careful and considered design;
- where possible, the fitting of new work to existing/old finishes & details, so that destruction of original fabric is minimised;

⁴ Historic England, 2017

⁵ After Clarke, p.12

- ensuring that the original layout of the building is legible so that visitors and future generations can read and understand the property and the metamorphosis that has taken place;
- the use of appropriate and quality materials, techniques & workmanship

The proposed repairs and alterations illustrated in this application for Listed Building Consent seek to follow these principles and policy guidance.

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) have clear guidance on the specification of appropriate and traditional building materials and techniques for conservation repairs and promote widely accepted principles for the management of change in our built vernacular heritage.

The 'preservation' of the existing historic fabric does not equate to a presumption against any intervention whatsoever, but it is the impact of the intervention on the integrity of the existing historic character of the 'host' building that is fundamental.

3.0 DESIGN (REPAIR) PROPOSALS

The principal works to the south (rear) elevation of The Swiss Cottage involve the reinstatement of the former doorway with a new vertical boarded painted timber door and frame, and the reinstatement of a former window opening by rebuilding the elevation back up to cill height (as evidenced by the cut-bricks and splayed brick reveals – *fig.8*) using salvaged bricks bedded in a lime : sand mortar, and the installation of a new 12-light painted timber, opening casement window. Internally the window reveals and new brickwork to cill height will be finished with a lime plaster.

The missing and damaged Hollington sandstone plinth will also be reinstated to match existing, and eroded brickwork re-pointed with a lime : sand mortar, and missing and damaged bricks replaced to match existing.

Redundant extract ventilation ducting and grilles, electrical fittings, cables and brackets will also be removed and the brickwork cleaned using a specialist DOFF/TORC system to remove previous paint finishes etc. and the brickwork repaired to match existing.

Missing timber glazing bars to the rear first floor window will be reinstated and new glass fitted. Three other smaller windows will be repaired and overhauled to match existing and damaged bricks to the cills replaced. Defective timber lintels will be replaced with new to match existing.

An area of defective roof tiles to the southeast elevation roof will be repaired using salvaged Staffordshire Blue plain clay tiles with new treated timber battens as necessary, and new black-painted cast iron rainwater goods fitted.

All existing rainwater goods and roof coverings will be cleaned of leaves, silt and moss/organic growth.



Figs.8 & 9 (left) Splayed and cut brickwork reveals to enlarged former window opening W.0.3; and (right) original metal-framed leaded light casement window W.0.2 currently boarded-over. Archaeological evidence informing the repair and reinstatement proposals (Source: ctd architects, 2021)

4.0 DESIGN & ACCESS CHARACTERISTICS

Use:	There is no proposed change of use.
Amount:	The proposed repair works will not make any changes to the original footprint of The Swiss Cottage.
Layout:	The proposed repair works will not make any changes to the existing layout of The Swiss Cottage.
Scale:	The proposals will not affect the size, scale or mass of The Swiss Cottage.
Landscaping:	The proposals will not affect the existing landscaping to The Swiss Cottage.
Appearance:	The appearance of the rear elevation of the cottage will be enhanced with the reinstatement of the original doorway and window opening, and the repair of the roof and masonry. Although the proposed alterations are not publicly visible they will restore The Swiss Cottage to a more accurate depiction of its original design intention.
Access Proposals:	The proposals will not affect the existing access arrangements.

5.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY & REFERENCE

British Standard BS 7913 : 2013; Guide to **The Principles of the conservation of historic buildings**; BSI 2013

Clarke, Kate; **Informed Conservation**; London; English Heritage; 2003

Department for Communities and Local Government; **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**; July 2021

English Heritage; **Conservation Principles : Policies and Guidance**; London; April 2008

Historic England; **Conservation Principles for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment**; London; Consultation Draft November 2017

Fisher, Michael; **Alton Towers**; Stoke-on-Trent; Urban Vision; 2015

Fisher, Michael; **Alton Towers : Past and Present**; Ashbourne: Landmark Publishing; 2009

Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners; **Alton Towers Conservation Plan** (Draft 4); London; 2008

Richardson, Thomas & Son; **The Strangers Guide or Description of Alton Towers, Staffordshire**; Derby; 1852

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) Manifesto, 1877

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council; **Alton & Farley Conservation Area Appraisal**; February 2008