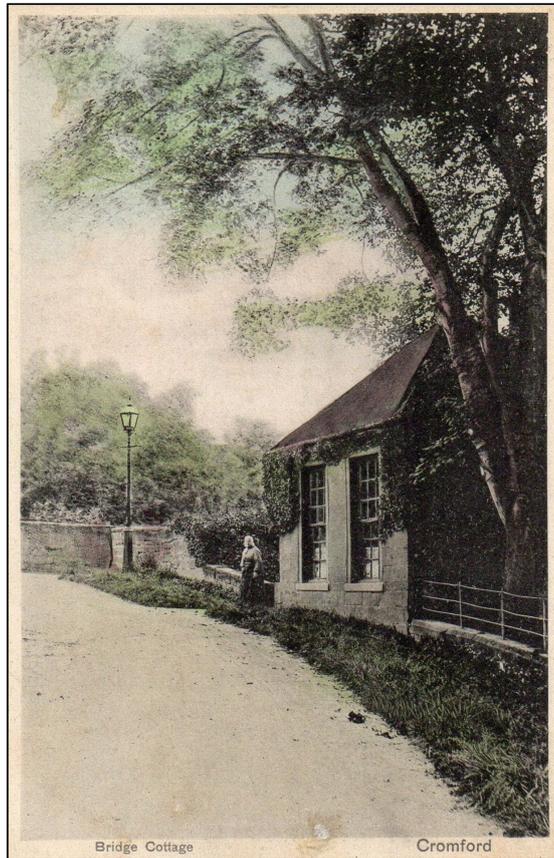


**AN HISTORIC BUILDING SURVEY  
OF BRIDGE COTTAGE,  
CROMFORD, DERBYSHIRE**



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**A report for  
Cromford Fly Fishers' Club  
and the  
Derbyshire Archaeological Society**

*by  
Richard Sheppard*

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## **1. Introduction**

The subject of this report is a small building situated at the north end of Mill Road just before it reaches Cromford Bridge, an historic crossing over the River Derwent. Cromford is a small village in central Derbyshire renowned for its industrial buildings dating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century linked to Richard Arkwright, one of the main drivers of the Industrial Revolution. The building in question is Grade II listed and it is commonly described as a fishing pavilion. This dates from at least the listing description of 1950 and is perpetuated in the latest edition of 'The Buildings of England: Derbyshire' (Hartwell, Pevsner and Williamson, 2016). It is also said to have been built by the Arkwright family.

Although the building has been owned and used by the Cromford Fly Fishers' Club since 1947 and is commonly known as the Fishing Pavilion (or Temple) this report prefers to use the name Bridge Cottage, which appears in the census returns of 1881 (and is shown on a postcard view from the early 1900s, reproduced here on the report cover). The question of the original purpose and date of the building is discussed below.

This report has been produced for the Derbyshire Archaeological Society (DAS) and for the Cromford Fly Fishers' Club (CFFC) who are intending to have a new concrete floor surface put into the basement; this area represents a sizeable storage area but for some time has been unusable. To this end a significant amount of soil and building rubble was removed by volunteers in October 2025 so as to reveal what might remain, if any, of the original floor surface, and to prepare for improvements. The building has lacked an electricity supply and this too is a proposed addition.

When alterations are proposed to historic listed buildings the relevant planning authorities may require a descriptive and analytical survey of the building concerned beforehand. This report pre-empts this by providing a detailed record of the building's form and what can currently be gleaned about its history and relevance. To this end the building was measured, photographed and researched. The author acknowledges the help of Ian Evetts of CFFC, Rosemary Annable of DAS, the staff of Derbyshire Record Office and at the Reading Room of the Museum of English Rural Life in the town of Reading.

## **2. Building Description**

Bridge Cottage is a small square building which fits the classification of a single-cell or one-unit cottage (Brunskill 1997, 88). It is stone built, with dressed Millstone Grit facing stones on three sides (Plates 5, 6) and rubble limestone on the east face (Plate 7) which also shows internally in exposed basement walling.

The ground floor west-facing windows and the north side entrance doorway have moulded frames and the cornice beneath the stone-slatted pyramidal roof is also moulded. On all four sides there is a slight 1 inch (25mm) wide plinth and the outer dimension below this is 18½ft (5.64m) across, with the walls having a 21 inch (53.5cm) thickness.

Internally, the building's floor space is 15ft (4.57m) square. There is a tall main floor area (12ft or 3.66m high) and a shallower basement beneath it which was probably half this height originally. The upper level (Plates 11-13) is lit by two tall windows on the west / road side, the direct doorway entry is central to the north wall and is opposite a fireplace built into the south wall (since removed). The basement (Plates 14-16) has an outer doorway entry immediately below that above, and it was lit by two smaller windows in the west wall, since blocked off. These probably had internal shutters. A narrow and roughly built fireplace has been attached to the south face of the basement. As the flooring between the two levels has been replaced, it is impossible to tell if there was once a ladder or staircase connecting the two levels. The recent re-roofing has not made allowance for the inclusion of an entry hatch into the roof-space so it is now impossible to determine the precise height of the walling.

The building was entered from the roadside through a gate leading onto a stone-built platform (Plate 8); this in part covered a short passage to the basement entrance below (also reached by steps down; Plate 9). The public sides of the building, as seen from Mill Lane, had the regular ashlar stone and moulded architraves, whilst the east side and the lower north side, beneath the plinth and hidden from view by the platform, were faced with rubble blocks. The two low basement windows in the east wall are now partly set below ground level, indicating that either the outside ground has subsequently built up or that there was a light well set back from the building. The former is more likely the case as the surrounding area has seen ground level changes to prevent flooding.

The east wall also features a modern opening near the south-east corner for cables to enter the basement. Higher up in the wall there is a solitary brick amongst the stonework, which appears part of the original build. Above this there are three areas of disturbance / infill indicating a former alignment of timbers for a lean-to or former attached structure. The south wall features a pronounced bow that may date from when the fireplace (and its flue and chimney?) were removed in the past.

Inside, the living room has three niches set into the walls for former shelf storage and one of the two replaced sash windows still retains some panelling. Two light fittings in the south wall suggest former gas lighting but this remains uncertain. The basement below has a narrow and poorly built stone fireplace, which appears to have been added; the opening for its upward draught is very small,

and just how effective the fireplace was is unclear. Clearance of the material in the basement has revealed the lack of flooring, although a small patch of flattish plaster does remain near the south-west corner, that may be part of a floor. Otherwise, the base now appears to be largely bedrock.

### **3. Known occupation history**

In the first national census return of 1841 the entry for the building was marked as n.k (not known), and although the name Hannah Fox has been mentioned as the occupant of the building, shown as Plot 600 on the Cromford Award of 1840, her name is not amongst those listed online in a transcription of the Cromford Tithe Award (DRO ref. D2360/3/52b) made in 2021. In 1840 Hannah was a young unmarried woman, but by 1851 she was living elsewhere, still unmarried but with four young children.

The first occupant definitely associated with the building was Mary Ratcliff(e), an unmarried cotton spinner /factory worker, who is listed in census returns from 1851-1881. For part of this time she shared the cottage with an elderly widowed aunt named Ann Stocks. In the later returns of 1871, 1881 Mary was described as unemployed and she eventually died in 1882 at the age of 74. In the 1891 census the house entry has been crossed out and in the 1901 census it is listed as a furnished house, but with no resident named. Although it may have had short-term residents (associated with the local mills), both the 1911 and 1921 censuses fail to name anyone after the entry for the adjacent properties at the (Canal) Wharf.

*The following is taken from 'The Fishing Lodge by Cromford Bridge' by Rosemary Annable of Derbyshire Archaeological Society (with a few additions):*

From 1914-1918 the lodge was used by the Matlock and Cromford Angling Association (now the Cromford Fly Fishers' Club) for meetings and as a store for members' tackle when fishing in the immediate vicinity. After 1918, the fishing rights were lost and not regained until 1931. From about 1920 the lodge began to fall into decay and in the early 1920s a sewer line was constructed along Church Walk, across the road and into the Meadows. This was excavated between the south wall of the chapel remains and the north wall of the lodge.

The importance of the building had, however, begun to be recognised. An Inspector from the Ministry of Works inspecting the chapel remains in 1928 commented 'Incidentally the adjacent XVIIIth cent. fish-house is quite a nice little building which ought not to be allowed to perish (Comment dated 22 May 1948, Ministry of Works file, WORK 14/1324, The National Archives). Shortly after this entry in 1950 the building was indeed granted listing protection.

During WWII the lodge was used by the Army as a guard house when mechanised units and stores were kept in the Meadows. Thereafter it became derelict. The roof and floor caved in, and all of the windows and frames were broken. In 1947 the lodge and fishing rights were purchased by the Matlock and Cromford Angling Association (now the Cromford Fly Fishers' Club). These were probably acquired from Charles L. L. Payne whose father had bought parts of the Arkwright estate in 1927.

In 1967 the building was completely restored and re-furnished by the club, with funding help from the district council and Derbyshire County Council. Plate 5a shows it before this restoration. Repairs continued through the 1970s-1990s when the building was put on the At Risk Register, but this was removed after remedial work in 2009. In 2020 the roof was completely replaced ('The Cromford Fly-Fishers Club. Stewards of the River Past, Present & Future 1874-2024', published privately by the Club for its 150th anniversary in 2024).

Author's note: that the building is described here as derelict after 1945 is not surprising as use by the Army often proved to be highly detrimental to the condition of many of the historic buildings requisitioned for military use during WWII. It is also interesting that the building was used as a guard house / control point, perhaps in a way replicating a similar original role by the bridge.

#### **4. The building's origin**

The building has been likened to a well-known fishing lodge in Beresford Dale in Staffordshire, built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Charles Cotton and associated with the author of the first definite book published on angling in England, Izaak Walton. This too is a small square structure with a pyramidal roof (Plate 17). It bears the initials CC and IW and the inscription *Piscatoribus Sacrum 1674*, a motto that means 'sacred to fishermen'. The same wording (without the date) has been added in the 20<sup>th</sup> century above the doorway of the Cromford building. However, there is no reason to believe that the 18<sup>th</sup> century builders of the Bridge Cottage were influenced by the Beresford building, and its parallel use now by the fishing fraternity is purely coincidental.

The Beresford building is fairly unique for its design in relation to its function. Fishing lodges, usually found on county estates, varied in date and design but had the common features of being well lit with numerous window openings on most sides, and being in close proximity to water. The Cromford building does not match this. It is raised above and away from the river bank and there is no suggestion that a good view of the river was a requirement; its principal windows face the road, not the river.

Small square buildings with pyramidal roofs are usually associated with country parks, being a design commonly used for entrance lodges. The main period for this 'classical box' design was 1740-1800 (Mowl and Earnshaw 1985, 95). Brunskill also dates most small single-cell cottages to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the latter half in particular. They usually have a floor area of 200-225sq feet (as in this case). Such buildings are rarely found within an urban context, although the pyramidal roof can be seen on 18<sup>th</sup> century scenic views of towns such as Durham where they appear on what were probably small riverside privies. The park gate lodge with its use of decorative display influenced the early architecture of the industrial revolution. One such use being the early toll-houses built alongside turnpike roads in the mid-late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is the author's contention that Bridge Cottage may originally have been built as a toll-house – see below. It is clearly of 18<sup>th</sup> century date. One possible confirmation of this is the brick set into the east wall. This is roughly 10 ins (253mm) long and probably 2½ ins thick (64mm), a size of brick found in the mid-late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Before examining the toll-house thesis it is necessary to see the building in its geographical and historic contexts. Firstly, it is situated close to Cromford Bridge, which when built in the medieval period was one of only a few crossings of the central stretch of the Derwent, and whose adjacent settlement on the north side of the river may have been the original village of Cromford. Amongst the buildings there is Bridge House, part of which is dated by dendrochronology to 1524. The bridge was one of only two in Derbyshire mentioned by John Leland in his Itinerary of 1535-43 (Riden 2020, 43). It was widened on its west /upstream side, most likely sometime between 1750-90. Writing in 1863, local resident Richard Hackett (who lived at nearby Mill House from at least 1841) claimed that until its widening it 'was termed a horse bridge, and was very narrow and inconvenient, being only half its present width'. However, a later writer estimated a likely original width of 12ft between parapets would have been sufficient for wheeled vehicles carrying lead to cross the bridge. It is today Grade II\* listed.

Also next to the bridge, and the cottage, are the remains of an early chapel, its proximity indicating it was a so-called bridge-chapel. Parts of it are keyed into the early bridge structure and stylistically it matches a suggested late 14<sup>th</sup> - early to mid 15<sup>th</sup> century date for the original bridge structure. The remains of the chapel were granted to the Derbyshire Archaeological Society in 1943 by its then owner and in 1951 the Society renovated it, with the removal of later additions, the rebuilding of unsafe walls and some archaeological investigation. In plan its west gable wall, the bridge parapet wall and the west wall of the cottage are on the same curvature next to the road.

Early views of the area around the river crossing show industrial workings associated with the lead trade. The smelting and furnacing of lead, probably

focussed on the area of the Green (the area around the later St Mary's Church, west of Mill Lane), continued for some time after Richard Arkwright (1732-1792) had built his first Cromford mill in 1771, next to Bonsall Brook. These lead workings were probably owned by local magnate Peter Nightingale junior of Lea (1736-1803), who was Arkwright's principal source of capital during the 1770s (Chapman 2013, 180).

Arkwright moved into a local residence, Rock House, in 1776 to oversee the construction of a second mill in 1777, and other building work in the industrial village continued up to 1790. He bought the manors of Cromford and Willersley for £30,000 in 1782 and work began on a new mansion Willersley Castle in 1786. Local lead, limestone, coal and textile proprietors were to benefit from the opening of the Cromford Canal in 1794, running from Mill Lane to Langley Mill near the border with Nottinghamshire.

Although Richard died in 1792 his son Richard II carried on with the business and completed the building of Willersley Castle by 1795, the laying out of its park and the final construction of a new church dedicated to St. Mary on the Green by 1797.

The earliest known view relevant to this discussion is a picture by John Cozens dating from 1772 which shows the chapel built up into cottages with a thatched roof, another small building to the north and a smelter chimney behind. The angle of the view means the cottage building, had it then existed, would have been hidden behind the chapel. A later view signed EE 1786 (by Elizabeth Evans of Bridge House?) shows what appears to be an angled roof behind the chapel, quite possibly the cottage (Plate 1). This area next to the bridge may have been owned by Nightingale who may have sold it to the Arkwrights during his period of financial troubles 1789-92.

By the late 1790s, when a number of famed artists had been commissioned to show the Willersley estate and surroundings (Plates 2-4), the chapel had been reduced, the outbuildings and industrial workings removed, and only the cottage remained in view. Perhaps for this reason it has been suggested that it was built at this time as an estate building and used by a supposed water bailiff (Buxton and Charlton 2013,); however, the authors provide no evidence to substantiate this.

## **5. Was it a Toll-house?**

The original purpose of the building remains unclear. The author has reason to suspect it was a purpose-built toll-house. It was situated next to a road which could be viewed through two large windows, which are noticeably out of

proportion to the façade in which they are set. The position on a bend allowed surveillance in both directions of travel. There are many similar examples of small square toll-houses with pyramidal roofs recorded, although relatively few have survived road widening and redevelopment (Plate 19). One such local but later example, two storeys tall, was at Ambergate (Knight 2016, 74). The later development of toll-houses with canted bays and of octagonal shape in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century is a more recognisable feature of toll-houses generally, and these are more likely to have survived and been listed (Plate 20). Toll-houses generally have not fared well. A gazetteer of Staffordshire toll-houses lists 229 houses as lost and 47 remaining (Jenkinson and Taylor 2014). Those set alongside canals are more likely to survive. If eventually it can be proved that Bridge Cottage was an early toll-house it would represent a now rare early example.

Before 1750 Derbyshire had only three turnpike roads, but between 1758-66, the period of 'turnpike mania', 22 Acts were passed for new ones (Scott 1973). Burdett's map of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century shows (as parallel solid lines) the Derby to Chesterfield turnpike (1759-60) passing through the village west of Mill Lane but it fails to upgrade the line of the Cromford Bridge to Langley Mill Turnpike (CBLMT) which was started in 1766. Turnpikes often started at bridging points (e.g Baslow Bridge to Calver Bridge turnpike 1759, Chesterfield to Matlock Bridge turnpike 1760), and toll-gates could be sited close to or actually on the bridges (Plate 18).

It is interesting that on three occasions between 1749-66 the High Constable described Cromford Bridge as 'out of repair' (DRO ref. Q/AH/1/6). The CBLMT started work on the turnpike in 1766 and it would have afforded a good occasion for bridge widening as the County authorities, who were responsible for bridge upkeep, could have shared the cost with the Trust.

The Turnpike Trust started with Peter Nightingale and George Evans of Bridge House amongst the trustees and early decisions recorded in the original minutes book from 1766-1806 (now at Reading University Special Collections) included ordering the construction of three principal toll-houses and gates at or near Cromford Bridge, Bullbridge and Peasy Lane (Ripley). An advertisement in the *Derbyshire Mercury* newspaper for tenders from builders is shown in Plate 21. These were three of the six main toll-gates points along the route, which passed through Holloway, Crich, Ripley, Codnor and Aldercar to near Langley Bridge. Samuel Bown and John Boden were paid £30-10s-0d to build the toll-house at or near Cromford Bridge and shortly afterwards Joseph Fritchley was appointed Collector of Tolls at this gate, with a salary of £8 per annum.

However, locating this toll point is far from clear as the name Burgin Lane is henceforth referred to in the minutes, and not Cromford Bridge itself. Later census returns indicate that Burgin Lane, a name now lost, was the lane that ran

for some distance from at least the Bridge towards Holloway, alongside the Derwent; it is now called Lea Road. The earliest detailed map, the tithe map, shows a toll-gate part way along this lane, close to where a railway bridge was later built (Figure 2b). This suggests that the toll-house was situated here, near but not at Cromford Bridge. The map is vague and shows a very small structure, suggestive of a booth rather than a building the size of Bridge Cottage.

Several questions can be posed:

1. Assuming that Bridge Cottage was indeed the building ordered in 1766, referring to it as Cromford Bridge toll-gate might have caused confusion with the official name of the Turnpike itself, starting with the location of Cromford Bridge.
2. The full length of Burgin Lane is unknown - it may have included the length of road later called Mill Lane.
3. Moving toll-gate points was something that trusts could do, and although this is not mentioned in the minutes, not all decisions were recorded in them. The minutes show that trustee meetings were for periods (sometimes extending over years) sporadic or non-existent, often adjourned by the Clerk when insufficient numbers of trustees attended. Also, many decisions about the road upkeep and other matters were left in the hands of appointed road surveyors.
4. Later trustee appointees included Richard Arkwright II, who joined in 1795. The toll point near the bridge may have proved a hinderance to him for movement between Willersley Castle and the mill sites. He may have lobbied (privately or otherwise) for its re-siting at another point along the road. Also, between 1796-98 there were hardly any committee meetings, so this could have escaped being recorded.

## **6. Recommendations**

The basement of the building has been effectively cleared of extraneous material and is ready for a new floor to be introduced. The author sees little reason for any further archaeological monitoring of this task. Likewise, the building's interior has been considerably altered through the various stages of its use and as few original features now remain within the interior work on installing an electricity supply should cause little concern for any significant disturbance. This should also allow for the infilling of the opening in the basement's east wall.

Amongst the material removed from the basement and now stored outside the building (Plate 10) is the moulded lintel of the original fireplace of the main floor area. This should be retained and kept safe within the building. Also, chunks of timber, parts of the original cross-beam(s), some with rafter seatings, are now

stacked up against the east wall and are now probably water sodden. Again, selected parts of these (those in relatively best condition) should also be retained, dried off and likewise kept within the building. Although consisting of softwood and with scant chance of offering dendrochronological (tree-ring) dates, advances in other dating techniques such as staple isotope dating, offers future chances of close dating of the building. No other aspect of the building holds that possibility, so this needs serious consideration for future study of the building.

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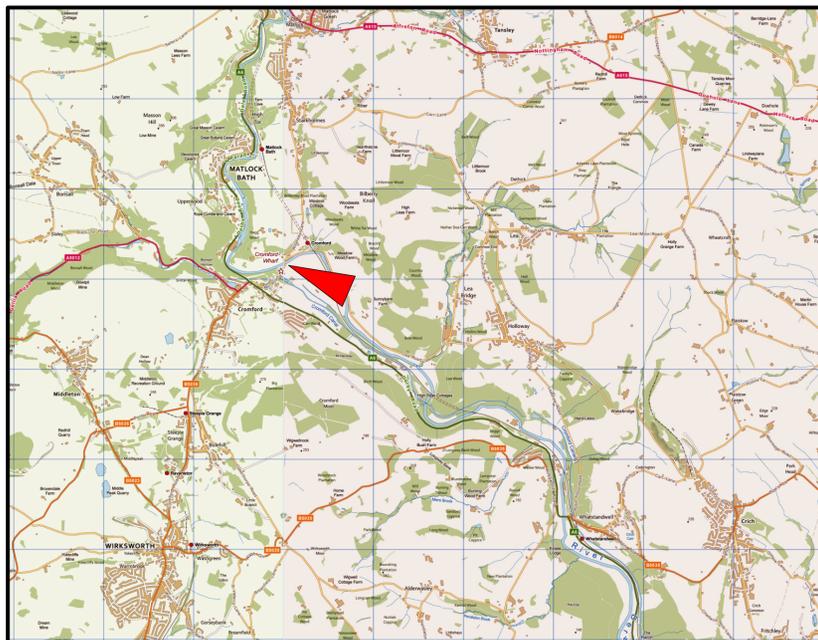
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# ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1a: Location of Cromford Bridge in relation to Matlock and the larger towns of Derbyshire.

Figure 1b: Position of Cromford Bridge on the River Derwent, and in relation to the village of Cromford and to Matlock Bath.



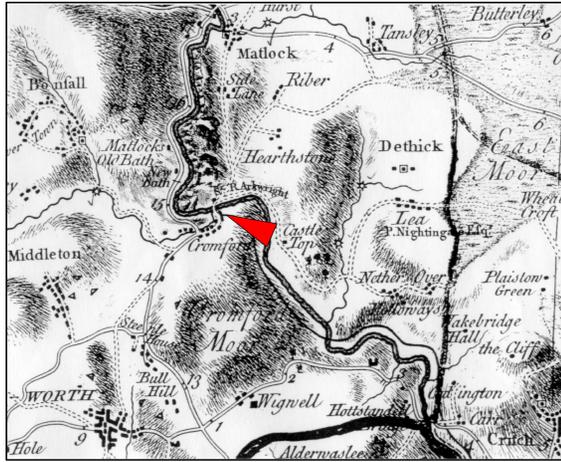


Figure 2a: Part of Burdett's map of Derbyshire, dating from 1767-91. The arrow points to Cromford Bridge, with a complex of buildings stretching along Mill Lane. The Lane connects to an angle in the turnpiked road running between Derby and Sheffield (1756) that passes through Cromford village.

Figure 2b: Part of the Matlock tithe map of 1848, showing Cromford Bridge (red arrow) and a toll-gate on the turnpike road to the north-east (green arrow).  
DRO ref. D2360\_3\_28a

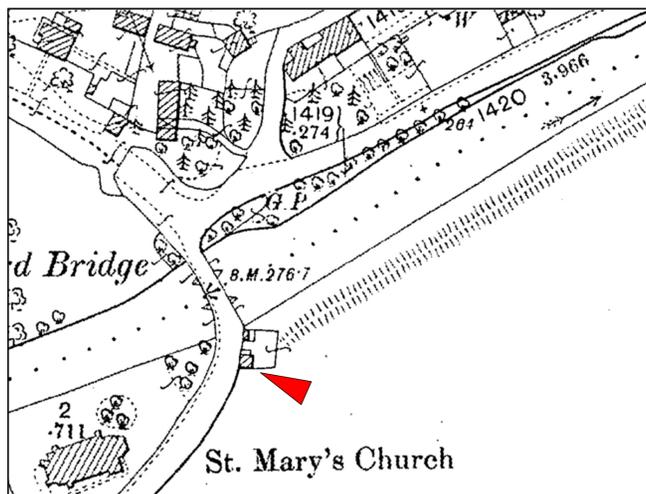
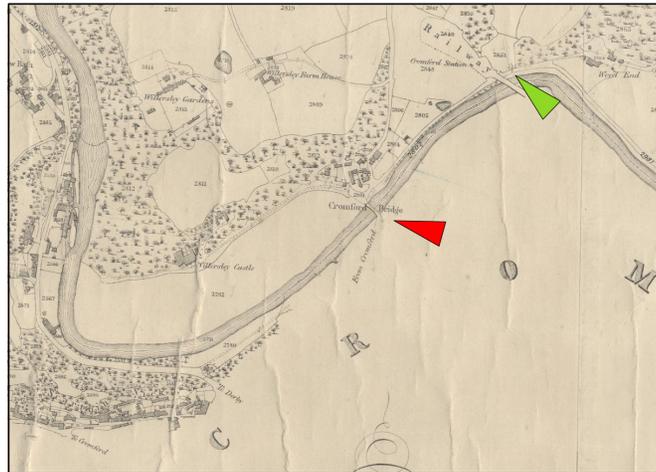


Figure 2c: Part of the 1900 Ordnance Survey 25 inch (1:2500) scale map, showing the cottage south of Cromford Bridge (red arrow).

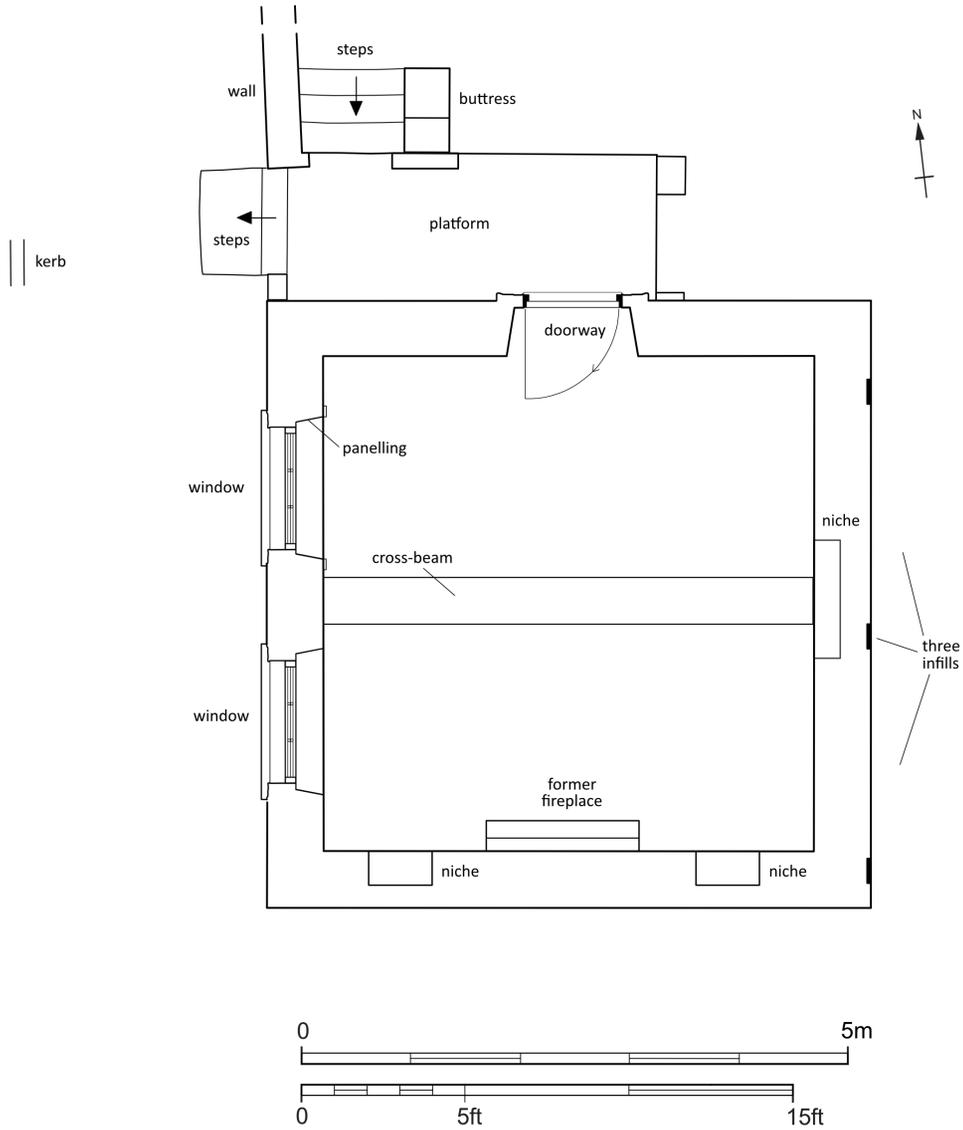


Figure 3: Bridge Cottage, Cromford: Plan of the main floor area. Scale 1:50.

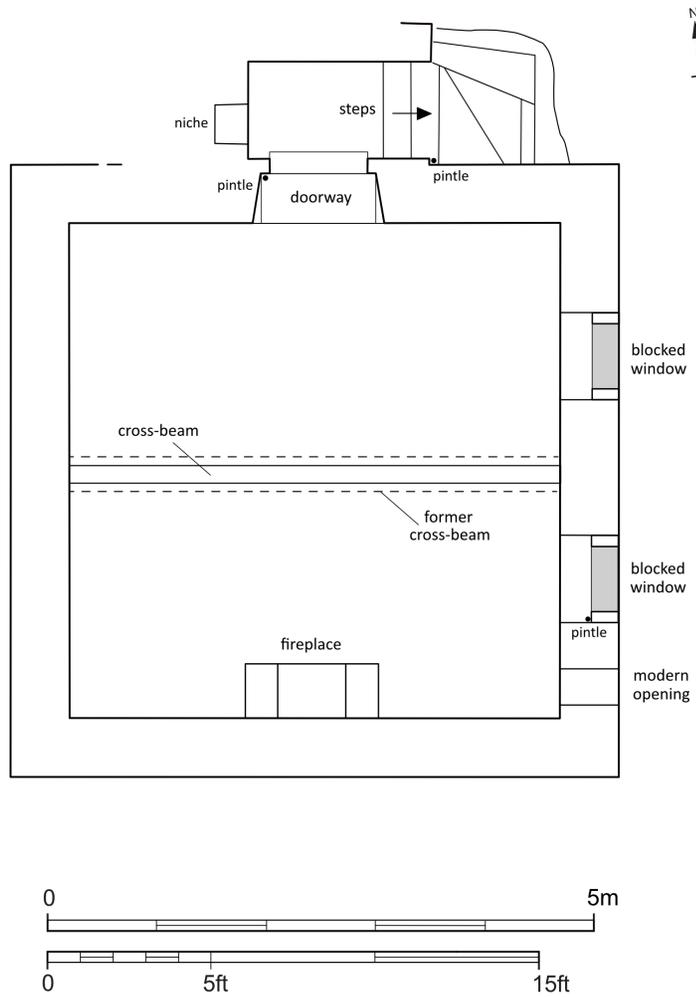


Figure 4: Bridge Cottage, Cromford: Plan of the basement area. Scale 1:50.

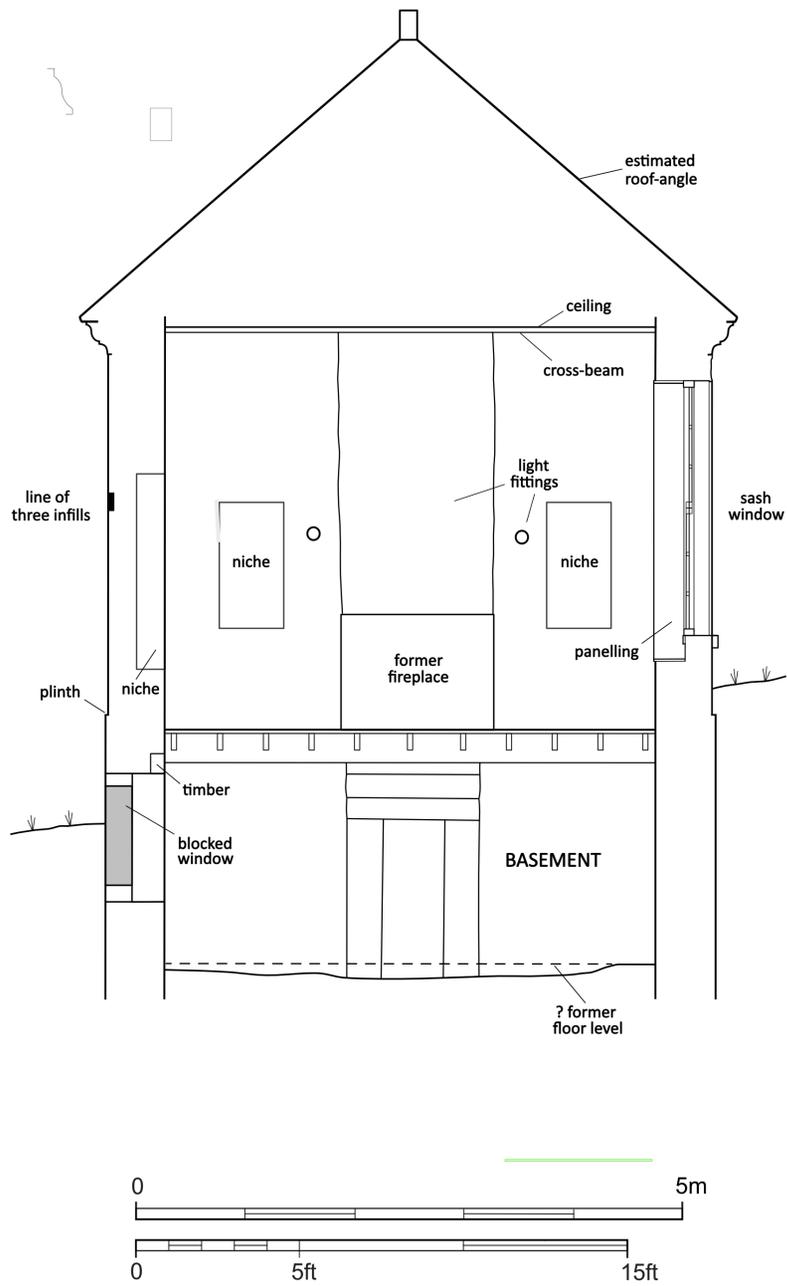


Figure 5: Bridge Cottage, Cromford: East-west cross-section and of view of internal south face. Scale 1:50.

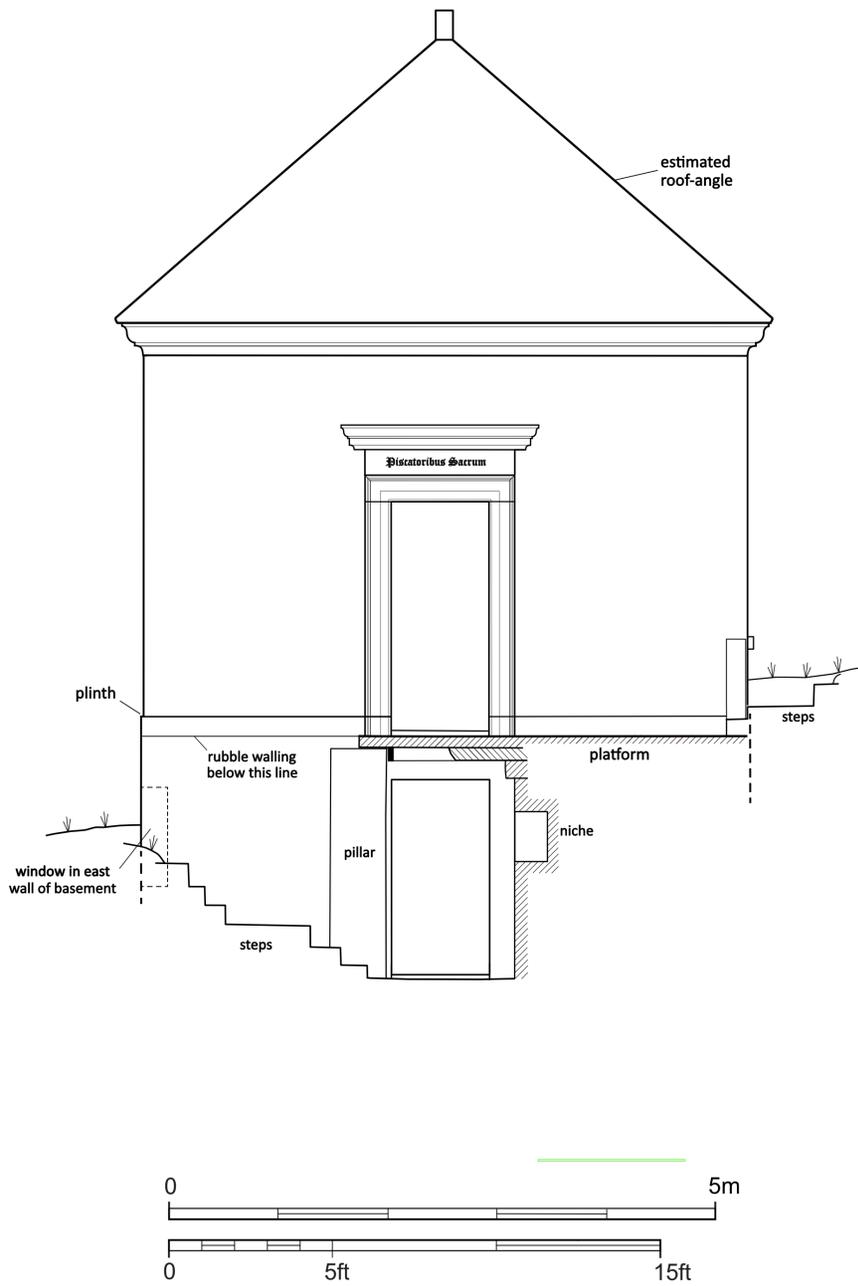


Figure 6: Bridge Cottage, Cromford: North face of the building and section through the external platform. Scale 1:50.



Plate 1: A watercolour view dated to 1786 by EE (?Elizabeth Evans of Bridge House) that may show the roof of Bridge Cottage, next to the chapel, that is here shown to the left when it was re-used as a pair of cottages.

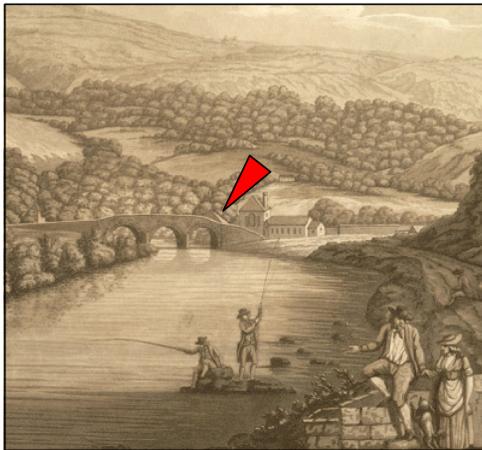


Plate 2: Part of a view by Samuel Hieronymous Grimm, painted before his death in 1794, showing a pyramidal roof between Cromford Bridge and St. Mary's Church, here highlighted by the red arrow.



Plate 3: Part of a view by Derby artist Joseph Wright painted 'no earlier than 1796' that shows Bridge Cottage quite after the buildings adjacent to it had been reduced or removed.



Plate 4: Part of a pen and wash painting by George Robertson from the late 1790s that shows clearly the west face of the building and a chimney on the south side.



Plate 5: Bridge Cottage: west and south sides, as seen from the present-day roadside.



Plate 5a: As a comparison, this is the poor state of the building in 1967 prior to repairs.  
*Derby Evening Telegraph 15/9/1967*

Plate 6: Bridge Cottage: South and east sides showing, together with the remains of Cromford Bridge Chapel, and, bottom right, their proximity to River Derwent.



Plate 7: Bridge Cottage: East side, showing the rubble stone facing, a modern low level opening and, above, a line of infilled holes (red arrows) and a single brick (yellow arrow).



Plate 8: Bridge Cottage: north side and external platform, with steps up to the roadside and steps down towards the chapel and riverbank.



Plate 9: Bridge Cottage: Steps down to the basement entrance below the platform, with niche for holding a lamp.



Plate 10: Timbers and stone features removed from the basement when cleared out in October 2025.



Plate 11: Bridge Cottage: main upper floor area, south face, with niches and rebuilt former fireplace.

Plate 12: Bridge Cottage: tall sash windows in west face, the nearer one still retaining some panelling.



Plate 13: Bridge Cottage: one of two Victorian-style gas light fittings (? inverted).



Plate 14: Bridge Cottage:  
exposed stonework in the basement area, with two infilled windows in east wall and part of doorway showing to left.

Plate 15: Bridge Cottage: added roughly constructed fireplace on south wall of the basement.



Plate 16: Bridge Cottage: base level of the basement after removal of builder's infill and rubble waste. What may be a small survival of the original plaster floor is highlighted with red arrow.

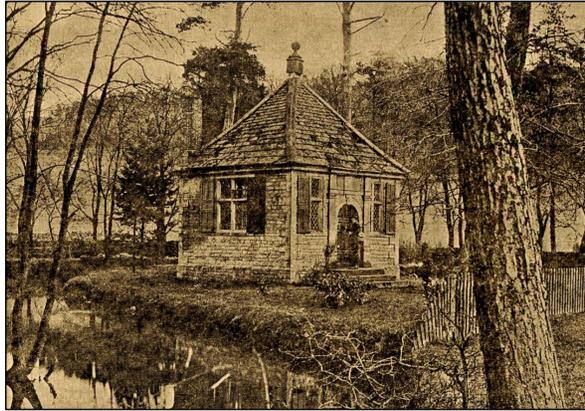


Plate 17: Postcard view of the famous fishing pavilion at Beresford Dale, Staffordshire, built in 1674 by local squire Charles Cotton, and frequented by Izaak Walton (author of the *Compleat Angler*, 1676).



Plate 18: Postcard view of the watch house (?toll house) at Baslow Bridge Derbyshire (bridge dated to 1618).



Plate 19: Postcard view of the a toll-house at Rotherham, an example of a small squarish single storey building with a pyramidal roof.

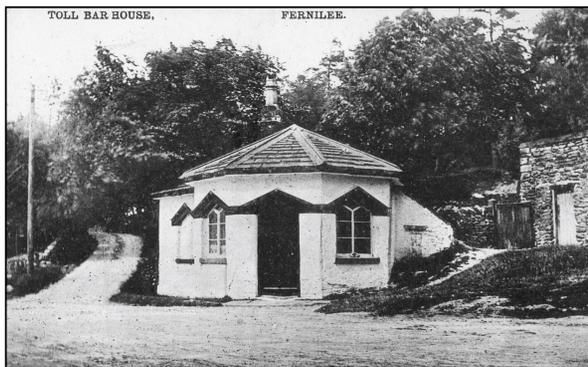


Plate 20: Postcard view of a typical early 19th century toll-house at Fernilee (near Whaley Bridge, Derbyshire).

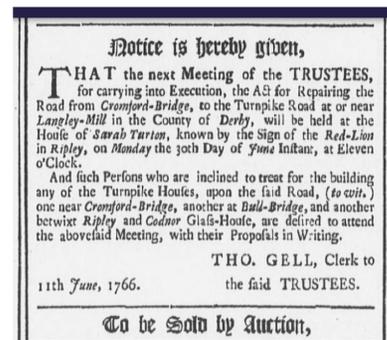


Plate 21: Advertisement in the *Derbyshire Mercury* newspaper from 1766 referring to a proposed toll-house near Cromford Bridge.