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The Cottage Idea

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At the beginning of *Sense and Sensibility* Jane Austen described the 'cottage' to which Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters were forced to withdraw on her husband's death. It was

defective, for the building was regular, the roof was tiled, the window shutters were not painted green, nor were the walls covered with honey suckles.¹

By 1811, when this novel was first published, there lay behind the fashion so gently mocked a complex mixture of ideas and forces that fundamentally changed the direction of architectural development.

If Barton Cottage was a defective example what was a true cottage? As Jane Austen's irony suggests more than one answer was possible, for the species was still in the process of definition, but certainly by 1811 a clear alternative to the regular tiled small Georgian house had been established. Its gradual emergence began before 1750 and continued at least to the 1830s, when Loudon's *Encyclopædia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture* offered a definitive treatment.²

The importance of the cottage as an architectural type has been made clear in studies of its later development, particularly by Vincent Scully in the publications based on his dissertation, 'The Cottage Style,' of 1949.³ In the middle of the nineteenth century, A.J. Downing, inspired initially by the work of Loudon, published a compendium of designs comparable to Loudon's *Encyclopædia of Cottage Architecture* in his *The Architecture of Country Houses*.⁴ Scully thoroughly explored the later influence of the cottage style on American architecture. The theoretical importance of its British origins deserves more attention than it has so far received. As it developed, the cottage idea promoted attitudes to

form, style, and function that became fundamental to both Victorian and modern architecture.

Our subject is not then the humble country dwelling that has existed since the beginning of settled life, but the cottage as an idea, an

1 J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811; reprinted London, 1967), 23.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at a meeting of the Scottish Georgian Society in February 1973. A more extensive discussion of the architectural theory will be found in M. McMordie, 'Pre-Victorian Origins of Modern Architectural Theory,' (Ph.D. dissertation, Edinburgh University, 1972). Relevant publications include S. Blutman, 'Books of Designs for Country Houses, 1780-1815,' *Architectural History*, xi (1968), 25-33; K.A. Esdaile, 'The Small House and its Amenities in the Architectural Handbooks, 1749-1847,' *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, xv (1917-19); M. McMordie, 'Picturesque pattern books and pre-Victorian designers,' *Architectural History*, xviii (1975), 43-59. In addition, my attention has been drawn recently by Pierre du Prey of Queen's University to Eileen Spiegel [Harris], 'The English Farm House: A Study of Architectural Theory and Design,' (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1960) and Georges Teyssot, 'Cottages et Pittoresque, les origines du logement ouvrier en Angleterre 1781-1818,' in *Architecture, Movement, Continuité*, 34 (1974), 26-37. Chapter viii of the Spiegel thesis deals specifically with 'The Labourer's Cottage' and raises some of the same points discussed here, more from an eighteenth-century perspective than from that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which I have adopted. Teyssot's article emphasizes the social and economic context of workers' housing as a new category of design and also recognizes its place in the development of architectural theory.

2 J.C. Loudon, *An Encyclopædia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture* (London, 1833).

3 The published material was brought together in V.J. Scully, Jr., *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style* (rev. ed., New Haven, 1971). See also an early brief discussion of the cottage by H.-R. Hitchcock in his *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration* (1929; reprinted New York, 1972), chapters I and II; and his fuller treatment of the period in his *Early Victorian Architecture in Britain* (2 vols., London, 1954-55). An early (and in many ways the most stimulating) discussion of the subject is Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque* (1927; reprinted London, 1967), particularly chapter vi, 'Architecture.'

4 A.J. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850; reprinted New York, 1969).

archetype for a building an architect might design and one which the richer and more leisured members of society might find attractive.

An early, if not the earliest, example of such a dwelling was the thatched cottage built in 1744 by the wealthy amateur architect Sanderson Miller for his own use.⁵ As an indication of its authenticity, Miller's Warwickshire cottage included pointed 'Gothic' windows, carried over from his experiments with the revival of mediaeval architecture. Horace Walpole, best known for his contribution to the early Gothic Revival, wrote in 1765 of his 'new cottage and garden [across from Strawberry Hill] so retired, so modest, and yet so cheerful and trim.' But in this case, the cottage was an existing one he adapted for his own use; it was 'to have nothing Gothic about it, nor pretend to call cousins with the mansion house.'⁶ Walpole's retreat was of a different variety of vernacular from Sanderson Miller's, but its existence serves to illustrate the spread of fashionable interest in such dwellings.

Meanwhile, there were, of course, cottages in the everyday utilitarian sense: the tumble-down (or sturdily standing) abodes of humble working people. These had been noticed by painters and landscapers as one of the features of rural Britain, and with the growth of interest in the countryside through the eighteenth century they gained a dual significance. Some saw these cottages as suitable architectural ornaments to the landscape. As such they were celebrated by Payne Knight in *The Landscape* (1794):

Nor yet unenvy'd, to whose humbler lot
Falls the retir'd and antiquated cot; —
Its roof with reeds and mosses cover'd o'er
And honeysuckles climbing round the door;
While mantling vines along its walls are spread,
And clust'ring ivy decks the chimney's head.⁷

In the 1790s Payne Knight and his friend Uvedale Price were chiefly responsible for establishing the cottage as an object of taste, the subject of a sophisticated and wide-ranging theory of design. Picturesque cottages subsequently came to be one of the important types of nineteenth-

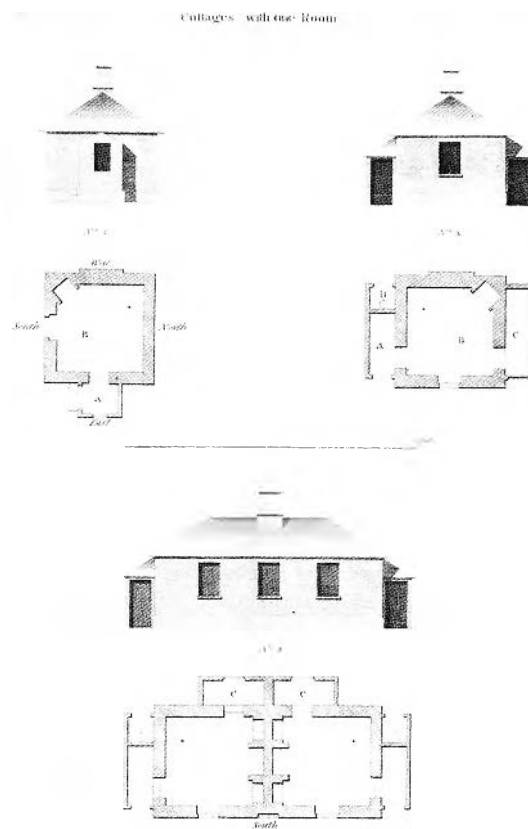


FIGURE 1. John Wood of Bath, *Cottages with One Room*, 1781. From *A Series of Plans, for Cottages*, plate 1 (Photo: British Architectural Library).

century building, both for social and architectural reasons.

Others, however, saw them in a different light. Along with the eighteenth-century theorists and taste-makers – often in the same person – laboured the eighteenth-century agricultural improvers. Parallel with Hume and Hogarth worked the practical pioneers Tull and Townshend. Their interest in the productivity of the countryside led to a more utilitarian view of the cottage. One of the pioneer agricultural experts was Nathaniel Kent, whose London agency specialized in the supervision of estates. In *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property* (1775) he published several designs for cottages. Their importance he explained in these terms: existing cottages were 'shattered hovels ... miserable tenements ... neither health nor decency can be preserved in them.' He was 'far from wishing to see the cottages ... fine or expensive,' and his own designs were simply 'tight and convenient.' This much improvement was, however, necessary because the cottagers themselves were 'the very nerves and sinews of agriculture.'⁸ Kent's

5 Miller's cottage is discussed and illustrated in I. Dickins and M. Stanton, eds., *An Eighteenth Century Correspondence* (London, 1910), 54, 267 ff, plate facing p. 2.

6 W.S. Lewis, ed., *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (London, 1941), 167.

7 R. Payne Knight, *The Landscape* (London, 1794), 36.

8 N. Kent, *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property* (2nd ed., London, 1776), 241-43.

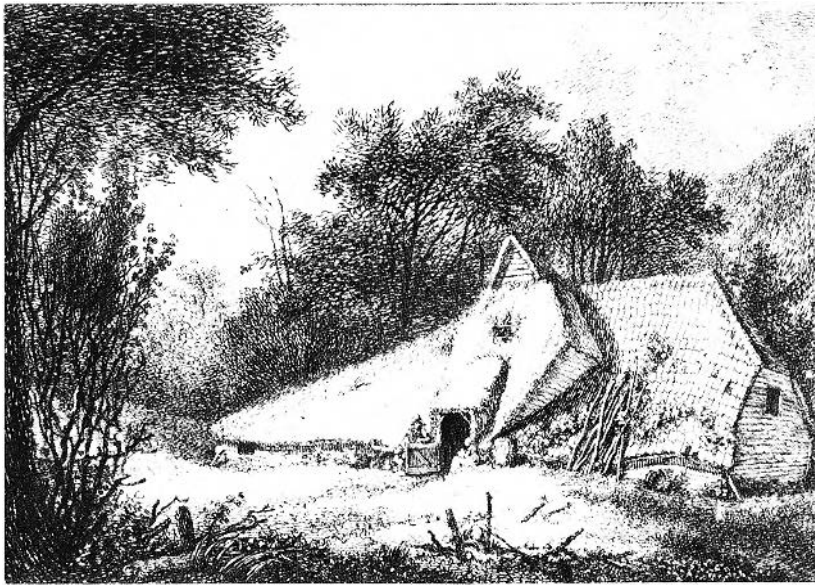


FIGURE 2. J.T. Smith, *Near Deptford, Kent*, 1797. From *Remarks on Rural Scenery* (Photo: National Library of Scotland).

economic argument for cottage design complemented the aesthetic approach taken by Knight and Price.

In the following decades, the contribution by architects to the design of estate cottages took account, in varying degrees, of both the aesthetic and the economic aspects. As artists, architects wished to treat the cottage as an ornament to the landscape as well as an improved and salubrious dwelling for the workers. Among the most eminent and interesting of the eighteenth-century cottage designers who exemplify this dual approach was John Wood the younger of Bath (Fig. 1). In his cottage designs he held fast to classical principles of architectural beauty while recognizing and responding to the immediate practical task. Beyond this, he expressed an unusual interest in the cottager's own situation and feelings. In his *Series of Plans for Cottages* (1781) he wrote:

In order to make myself master of the subject it was necessary for me to feel as the cottager himself; for I have always held it as a maxim, and however quaint the thought may appear, unless he ideally places himself in the situation of the person for whom he designs.⁹

By 1790 the efforts of Sanderson Miller, Kent, Wood, and Price had established as categories of cottage design utilitarian and ornamental cottages for the rural poor, and also the modest but comfortable country retreat for the fashionable and rich. As well, there were the two broad categories of style: the regular, preferred both by practical men like Kent and by classical designers like Wood and Soane, and as an increasingly

successful alternative, the irregular cottage dear to the picturesque theorists.

The development of these categories after 1790 was overtaken and transformed by the growing social and technological revolution already underway. In particular the expansion of the urban middle class drastically altered patronage of architecture and in so doing gave new significance to the idea of the cottage.

This evolution can most clearly be followed in the books of cottage designs which appeared with the great flowering of illustrated publications between the 1790s and 1830s (a phenomenon also supported by the middle-class market). These published cottage designs and their explanatory texts record the growth of the cottage idea and explain as well as illustrate the transformation of British architectural theory through these critical decades.

The growth of the 'cottage idea' through the early nineteenth century concerns not just the picturesque, vernacular cottage, although in some ways its development is the best index of the acceptance and refinement of the idea. In addition, there is the growth of a comprehensive catalogue of styles which could be applied to the cottage (and including the deliberate mixing of styles), and finally, there is the effective abandonment of style and a foretaste of the twentieth-century architectural revolt. A selection

9 J. Wood, *A Series of Plans, for Cottages or Habitations of the Labourer* (London, 1781), 3. This popular book came out in new editions in 1792 and 1806, and was reprinted in 1837.

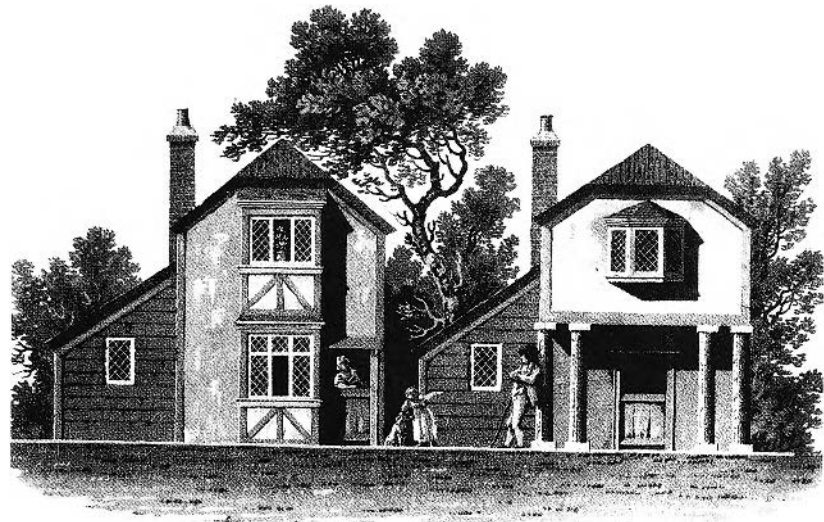


FIGURE 3. James Malton, *Peasant Huts*, 1798. From *An Essay on British Cottage Architecture*, plate IV (Photo: Edinburgh University Library).

from the most relevant and interesting designs illustrates the growth of the vernacular, the combination of the picturesque and the classical, and finally, the elimination of style altogether.

A closer look at the designs and their attendant theory must begin with a book of 1797, J.T. Smith's *Remarks on Rural Scenery*. Smith's twenty etchings of cottages from life show, as it were, the raw material for the cottage idea, and they also show how, by the end of the eighteenth century, the picturesque qualities of the real thing had come to be valued (Fig. 2). It must be noted that however attractive Smith's illustrations may have been as graphic art, they were hardly satisfactory dwellings. That particular point was made in the following year by James Malton in his *Essay on British Cottage Architecture*. This was the first book to be devoted exclusively to original designs for cottages. Malton had worked earlier in the century in Ireland as topographical artist and had architectural connections through Thomas, his elder brother. Thomas Malton worked for James Gandon in London and had studied at the Royal Academy Schools as an architectural student, although he never practised and was refused election as an Associate of the Royal Academy. Although James Malton seems to have fallen short of the fulfilment of his architectural ambitions, he was representative of a great number of designers on the fringe of the profession in this period (including many of the authors of the cottage books examined here). Malton described

his *Essay* as 'an attempt to perpetuate on principle that peculiar mode of building, which was originally the effect of chance' (Fig. 3).¹⁰ Malton acknowledged the influence of Price and Payne Knight but gave the idea of the picturesque a more practical interpretation. Whereas Smith, commenting on his etchings of existing cottages, had suggested that 'so much is irregularity of parts a constituent of beauty, that regularity may almost be said to be deformity,'¹¹ Malton qualified the notion: 'a well chosen irregularity is most pleasing; but it does not of consequence follow that all irregularity must be picturesque. To combine irregularity into picturesque is the excellence of cottage construction.'¹²

Malton, as a practical designer, made a further point that escaped Price and others whose interest was more purely aesthetic. Although convenient arrangement had always necessarily been a large part of the architect's task, since the Renaissance it had been subordinate to beauty, particularly to the regular and proportioned arrangement of a building's masses and its principal elevations. Malton was among the first to argue that picturesque design could be directly derived from convenient arrangement; he made it a principle 'to let the outward figure conform only to internal conveniency; and rather to overcharge projecting parts than in any wise to curtail them.' He also noted that because 'an agreeable irregularity is one of their principal beauties ... there will always be an opportunity of ... additions ... without injury to the design. It is otherwise, in regular compositions of architecture.'¹³

Malton's essay not only made a constructive response to Price's comments on the picturesque

¹⁰ J. Malton, *An Essay on British Cottage Architecture* (London, 1798), title page.

¹¹ J. T. Smith, *Remarks on Rural Scenery* (London, 1797).

¹² Malton, *Essay*, 19 ff.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 26 ff.

cottage in landscape but went beyond it in the matter of function. It also gave a new and patriotic sense to the use of vernacular as being peculiarly 'British,' similar to the arguments later deployed in defence of revived Tudor. All of this, of course, was appropriate to a time of international crisis when relations with the Continent were at their lowest point. Despite his claims, however, Malton's buildings were more romantic fantasies than accurate reproductions of actual cottage buildings. To be fair, he was not aiming at a literal rendering, rather he emphasized the designer's creative role. Through the following years, there developed an increasing expertise in the rendering of the detail of traditional cottage buildings – paralleled, of course, by the increasing scholarship of architects working in other and competing styles.

Progress towards a more expert understanding of the vernacular cottage was made by one of the pioneers of the Scottish Baronial style, William Atkinson. In *Views of Picturesque Cottages*, 1805, he accompanied illustrations of quite habitable dwellings observed in various parts of England with plans and, as well – an important development – 'observations on the different materials used for building them, and producing picturesque effect' (Fig. 4).¹⁴ This seems to have been a significant step forward from the generalized picturesque rustic cottage to a grasp of essential local differences in form and materials. Such an approach was, of course, essentially alien to the classical designers.

The further development of what came to be called the 'cottage' style shows the increasing

middle- and upper-class taste for these symbols of modest and informal living. As early as 1795, John Plaw had illustrated a 'Villa in the Cottage Stile' (Fig. 5). Designs that were even larger and grander in scale appeared until Peter Frederick Robinson suggested that his 'Cottage Style' residence of 1823 (Fig. 7) might rather be described as in the style of the 'Ancient Manor House.' Robert Lugar, a successful designer of substantial Gothic houses, introduced the term *cottage ornée* or 'gentleman's cot' in his *Architectural Sketches for Cottages* (1805) for the next class of house above the peasant's cottage, and described it as follows (Fig. 6):

These should possess particular neatness, without studied uniformity. The irregularity may be as great as in the peasants'; and partake alike of a broken form, which in high degree contributes to the general effect. Deep recesses and bold projections are great assistants, while the play of light and shadow which they produce, heighten a brilliant and pleasing effect: but, as before noticed, neither should appear without its use, otherwise what was intended to embellish will only serve to encumber.¹⁵

The 'villa' he distinguished in 1805 as being 'a more regular kind of building,'¹⁶ but by 1828, he was conforming to a changed usage by illustrating 'cottage' designs in his volume of *Villa Architecture* including an 'improved and enlarged

14 W. Atkinson, *Views of Picturesque Cottages* (London, 1805), iii ff.

15 R. Lugar, *Architectural Sketches for Cottages, Rural Dwellings, and Villas* (London, 1805), 10 ff.

16 *Ibid.*, 15.



FIGURE 4. William Atkinson, *Cottage*, 1805. From *Views of Picturesque Cottages*, plate II (Photo: British Architectural Library).

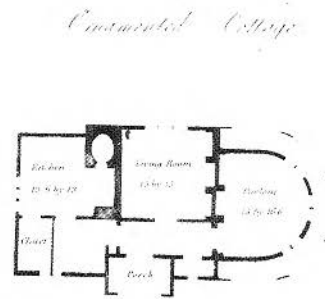
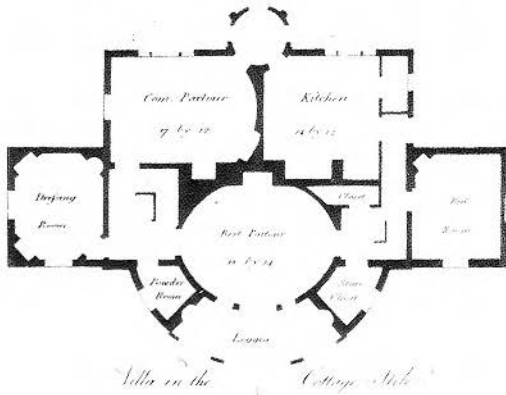
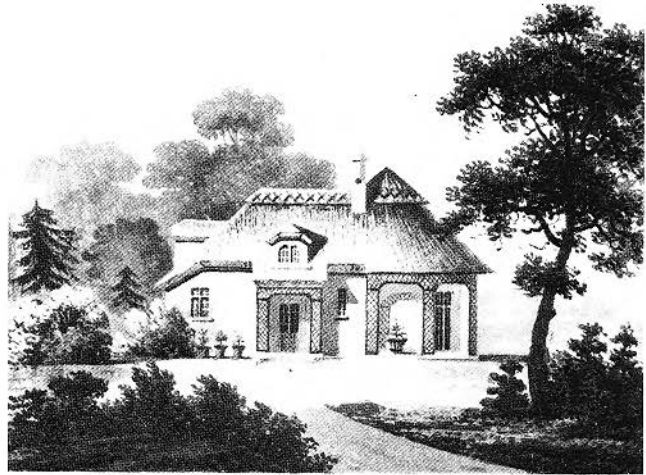
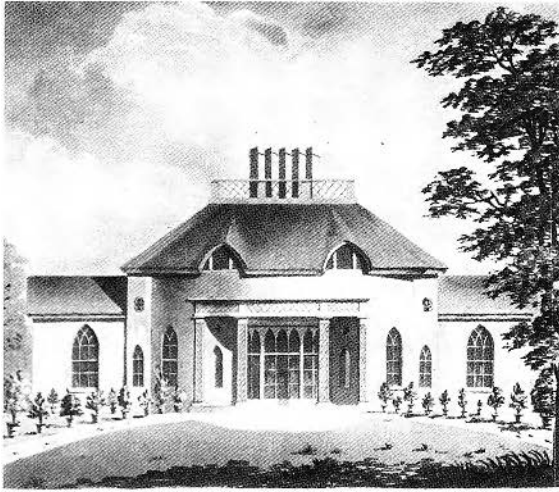


FIGURE 5. John Plaw, *Villa in the Cottage Style*, 1795. From *Ferme Ornée*, plate xx (Photo: British Architectural Library).

FIGURE 6. Robert Lugar, *Ornamented Cottage*, 1805. From *Architectural Sketches for Cottages*, plate vi (Photo: British Architectural Library).

FIGURE 7. Peter Frederick Robinson, *Cottage Style Residence*, 1823. From *Rural Architecture*, plate 88 (Photo: Edinburgh University Library).



fisherman's hut' from the Isle of Wight (Fig. 8).¹⁷ Finally, Francis Goodwin's 'villa in the cottage style' (1834; Fig. 9) suggests a scale of construction entirely inconsistent with the cottage idea; he estimated its cost at £2,750 in brick, with £280 extra for stone quoins. The inflation of the cottage was summed up by the *Penny Cyclopaedia* supplement in 1845:

The term cottage has for some time past been in vogue as a particular designation for small country residences and detached suburban houses, adapted to a moderate scale of living, yet with all due attention to comfort and refinement. While, in this sense of it, the name is divested of all associations with poverty, it is convenient, in as much as it frees from all pretention and parade and restraint.¹⁸

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the chief alternative to the irregular vernacular cottage was the 'regular' classical type, though largely stripped of expensive and inappropriate ornament. As the market grew other styles were promoted, including, for instance, T.F. Hunt's Tudor, Jacobean, and rural Italian (Tuscan), as well as more exotic varieties.¹⁹ One of the most ingenious contributions to the search for stylistic models was G.L. Meason's *The Landscape Architecture of the Great Painters of Italy* (1828; Fig. 10), and again the idea of taking buildings from paintings was derived from Price and Payne Knight. Another similar volume was Francis Stevens's *Views of Cottages and Farm Houses in England and Wales* (1815), which illustrated structures drawn from paintings by Gainsborough and others. The more elaborate styles were most directly applicable to larger houses, but as Loudon's *Encyclopaedia of Cottage Architecture* (1833) later witnessed, almost all could be applied to cottages as well. Indeed in his *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture* (1828), Loudon presented the results of a world-wide survey in which he discussed farm buildings, including small houses from the Americas and the Orient as well as from all across Europe. One particular variety of lasting fame, at least in London, was the Swiss Cottage style first popularized by P.F. Robinson in 1827 (based on buildings seen in Switzerland in 1816).²⁰

Opponents to such promiscuous style-mongering held firm to well-established principles; of the straightforward 'classical' Georgian style Richard Elsam had this to say in 1803 in his *Essay on Rural Architecture* (Fig. 11):

Uniformity in the retired cottage, situated alone, I shall endeavour to prove cannot be too studiously attended to. Mr. James Malton, in his 'Essay upon British



FIGURE 8. Robert Lugar, *Improved and Enlarged Fisherman's Hut*, 1828. From *Villa Architecture*, plate xi (Photo: British Architectural Library).

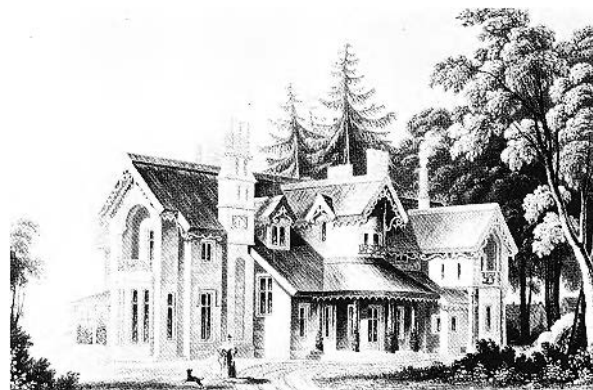


FIGURE 9. Francis Goodwin, *Villa in the Cottage Style*, 1834. From *Domestic Architecture*, II, plate xv (Photo: British Architectural Library).

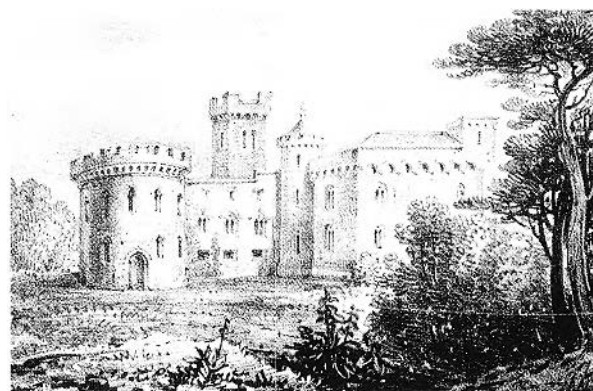


FIGURE 10. G.L. Meason, *Building, after Claude Lorraine*, 1828. From *The Landscape Architecture of the Great Painters of Italy*, plate XLVI (Photo: National Library of Scotland).

17 R. Lugar, *Villa Architecture* (London, 1828), 11.

18 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'Cottage,' 4.

19 See, for instance, T.F. Hunt, *Half-a-Dozen Hints on Picturesque Domestic Architecture* (London, 1825); Hunt, *Architettura Campestre* (London, 1827); J.B. Papworth, *Rural Residences* (London, 1818); J. Thompson, *Retreats* (London, 1827).

20 P.F. Robinson, *Rural Architecture; or a Series of Designs for Ornamental Cottages* (London, 1823), design no. VIII.

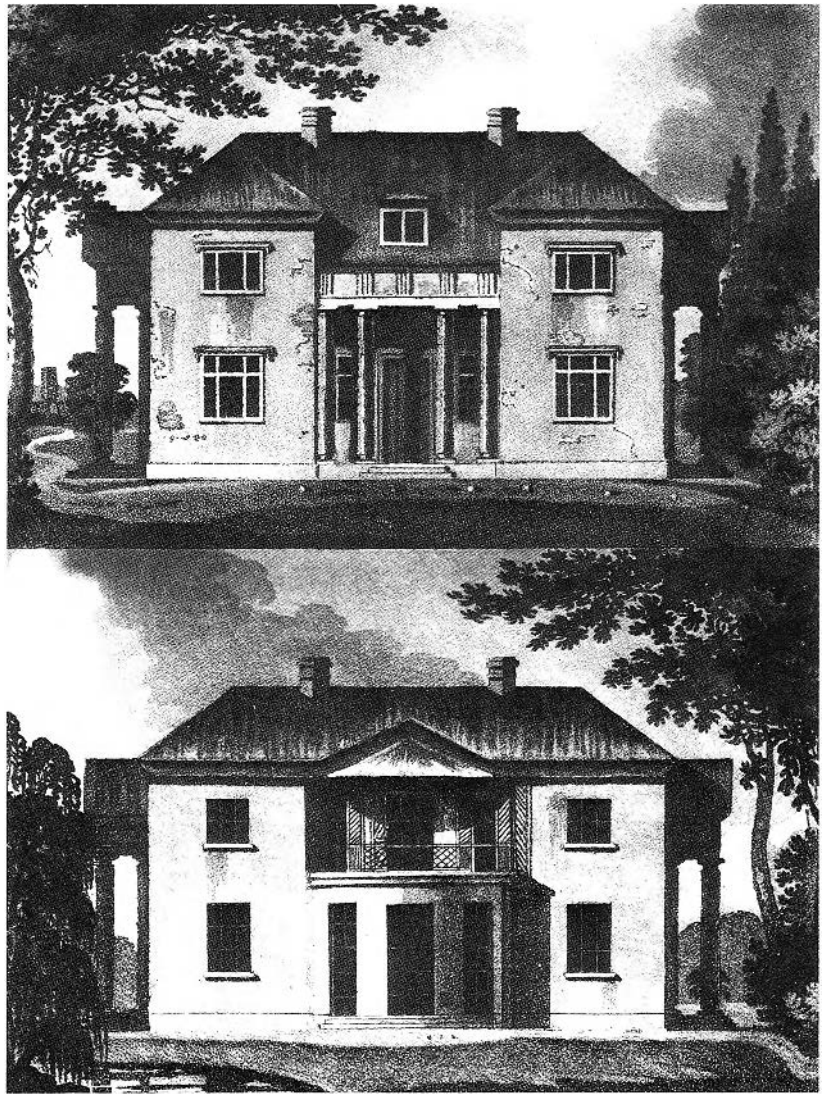


FIGURE 11. Richard Elsam, *Rustic Cottage ... the entrance front is engraved for the purpose of exhibiting the aspect of a modern antique, in order thereby, to prove the folly of erecting new houses to produce the effect of antiquity*, 1803. From *An Essay on Rural Architecture*, plate 1 (Photo: Edinburgh University Library).

Cottage Architecture,' has given to the world several designs in support of a contrary opinion; but with great respect for the talents of that gentleman, I think he hath suffered his better taste to be overcome by a too zealous partiality for the rusticity of architecture; in so much as he hath strongly recommended the adoption of whatever appears to have been the result of chance, the want of contrivance, and also of all regularity than which, in detached small buildings, nothing can appear more unseemly or unhandsome.²¹

It is perhaps a measure of the strength of the growing picturesque fashion that in a second

21 R. Elsam, *An Essay on Rural Architecture* (London, 1803), 3 ff.

22 Elsam, *Hints for Improving the Condition of the Peasantry, with Plans ... for Cottages* (London, 1816), 'To the Reader.'

23 E. Aikin, *Designs for Villas and Other Rural Buildings* (London, 1808), pl. 1.

24 *Ibid.*, pl. xv.

25 R. Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (2nd ed., London, 1805), 223 ff.

book, *Hints for Improving the Condition of the Peasantry* (1816), Elsam recanted; while promoting the comfort, health, morals, and condition of the peasantry, he introduced at the same time 'a more characteristic style of building than at present prevails.'²²

Others continued to produce strictly formal regular houses, hardly cottages at all, such as Edmund Aikin's design of 1808 (Fig. 12).²³ When Aikin, an amateur scholar of Greek architecture, did turn to the 'picturesque,' he preferred to work in an Italian style.²⁴ Still other architects began to experiment with the combination of elements from different styles. The mixing of styles had been recommended by Payne Knight in 1805 as a way of creating the illusion of antiquity in larger houses²⁵ and was employed by him in his own house, Downton. Loudon in 1806 gives Robert Adam credit for having introduced

the practice.²⁶ There was limited scope for it at the cottage scale; here, however, a more fundamental theoretical fusion could and did take place.

Classical and picturesque were not always in opposition. Some of the most remarkable creations of the period appeared in 1805 and represent an attempt at synthesis of the two approaches: these were the designs of Sir John Soane's sometime assistant Joseph Michael Gandy (Fig. 13). The drawings speak for themselves, and Gandy's text makes clear that while his training and his other work were essentially classical, he brought together here all three of the essential strands of cottage design: the classical, the picturesque, and the social. The text of his *Designs for Cottages* (1805) referred first to the philanthropic and agricultural arguments for improving cottage design, including not just questions of the cottager's well-being and general utility, but also the advancement of public taste. He went on to argue that there was an essential connection between the aesthetic quality of the dwelling and moral development. Gandy's aesthetic argument is perhaps the key statement of strict picturesque classicism (although the term has been given a much wider application). The question, as Gandy thought, was

whether Architectural Design, in general, should be uniform, that is, having corresponding parts on each

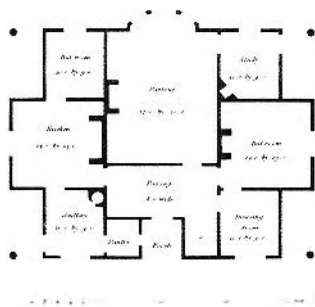


FIGURE 12. Edmund Aikin, *Cottage*, 1808. From *Designs for Villas*, plate 1 (Photo: Edinburgh University Library).

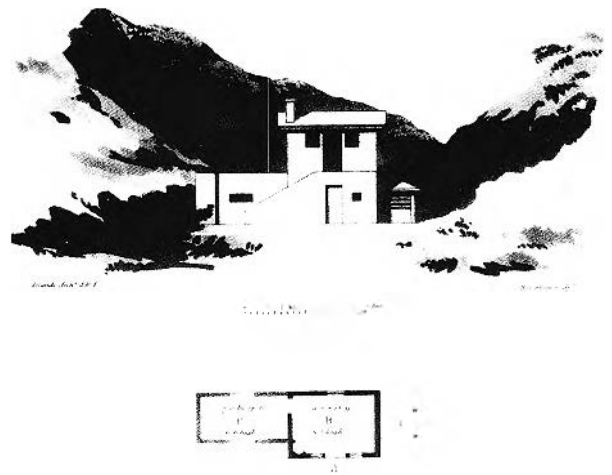


FIGURE 13. Joseph Michael Gandy, *A Single Cottage*, 1805. From *Designs for Cottages*, plate xv (Photo: Edinburgh University Library).

side of its centre; or whether they should be composed of parts dissimilar though harmonious.²⁷

His answer was that while uniformity was necessary for the higher classes of architecture, for most purposes variety was 'a grand principle of beauty in building.' He pointed out that classical buildings as actually perceived were symmetrical only from a viewpoint on the buildings' axes: 'from any other point of view they fall into the picturesque by the change of perspective.' Together with Gandy's almost complete rejection of ornament (Fig. 14), both for reasons of economy and from the influence of continental rationalism, this argument produced a remarkable set of designs which point the way towards the twentieth-century International Style even more clearly than its continental ancestor, the Neoclassicism of Gilly and Schinkel.

Through the following years a retreat began from the flexibility and inventiveness epitomized by Gandy and evident in others such as J.B. Papworth.²⁸ The growing emphasis on informal dwellings for the middle and upper classes, not only as country retreats but increasingly as principal dwellings, and particularly the growing importance of the suburban house, brought a

26 Loudon, *A Treatise on Forming, Improving and Managing Country Residences* (London, 1806), 114.

27 J.M. Gandy, *Designs for Cottages, Cottage Farms and Other Rural Buildings* (London, 1805), vii. Contrary opinions on Gandy are presented by J. Summerson, 'The Vision of J.M. Gandy,' in *Heavenly Mansions* (1948; reprinted New York, 1963), 111-34; and Dimitri Tselos, 'Joseph Gandy, Prophet of Modern Architecture,' *Magazine of Art*, xxxiv (May 1941).

28 Papworth, *Rural Residences*.

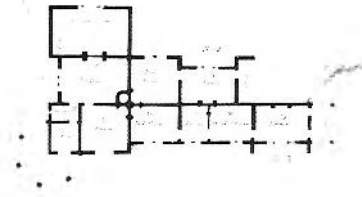


FIGURE 14. Joseph Michael Gandy, *Four Cottages*, 1806 (Photo: Edinburgh University Library).

desire for individual and distinctive features by which each owner could be set apart from his neighbour. Many designers became entirely eclectic in their choice of style, suiting it to the status and occupation of the intended resident. J. Thompson, for instance, adopted what he called 'Grecian' for 'the residence for an active partner in a mercantile house' while a 'Corinthian villa' was intended to 'possess an elevation of character corresponding with the rank of the inhabitant' who was to be a member of the nobility.²⁹ There now appeared a worsening of taste, suggested as much in the woodcut illustrations that superseded the more subtle aquatints and lithographs as in the design themselves.

One final movement in the cottage idea must be noted. It was suggested above that agricultural improvement had stimulated the desire to build more comfortable habitations for the agricultural worker. As awareness of urban squalor grew in the early decades of the century, similar attention began to be attracted to the city dweller's housing. For a time the cottage was seen to provide a more salubrious alternative to the jerry-built tenements in London and some of the older provincial cities. Among the early attempts to build improved

housing in London was a street of terraced houses in Pentonville (1844-45) designed by Henry Roberts.³⁰ These were arranged more or less on the cottage pattern internally and were only two storeys high. And in Edinburgh, just a little later, there were similar experiments in low-rise cottage-type dwellings organized in larger blocks.³¹ The idea of urban cottages was, however, quickly abandoned in favour of multi-storey tenement blocks as a more suitable pattern for urban housing. There is some doubt that these were ever generally welcomed by their inhabitants, at least in London, as Bardwell suggested in 1854 when he wrote:

It is now become pretty well-known that, to the larger buildings erected in various parts of the metropolis, the superior artisans and their wives have many serious objections, greatly disliking a species of communism, and the apparent opportunity afforded to numerous parties of unkindly noticing their habits or prying into their domestic economy. Their pride also revolts against the barrack-like appearance, or character, of these establishments and they appear to consider themselves more at 'home' in the mean little dwellings of the back streets.³²

But then Bardwell seems to have been unusual among reformers of the period for his interest in the sentiments of the subjects of his concern.

Another sympathetic commentator on the housing problem was the Scottish landscape designer and writer already mentioned, John Claudius Loudon. In his *Encyclopædia of Cottage Architecture*, first published in 1833, Loudon summed up the development of the cottage at the beginning of the Victorian period. There is much of interest in Loudon, including his own comprehensive statement of architectural principles, but it is his approach to cottage design and theory which is particularly important here. He seems to have been very open in his architectural sympathies although deeply influenced by the picturesque: indeed, in his *Country Residences* (1806) he described himself as the only professional 'picturesque improver.' In cottage design he tended, for reasons of economy, to support basic classical principles: the neat rectangular dwelling approaching a cube in its proportions enclosed the maximum volume for least cost. This cube, he thought, could be embellished as appropriate to the taste and circumstances of its occupants. In his *Encyclopædia of Cottage Architecture* he illustrated a wide range of possible styles, including rustic Italian, Swiss, and so on through to more or less conventional classical and Gothic (Fig. 15), but he also saw that style itself might be dispensi-

²⁹ Thompson, *Retreats*, 1, 21.

³⁰ See J.N. Tarn, *Working-class Housing in 19th-Century Britain* (London, 1971), 6. Also N. Pevsner, 'Model Houses for the Labouring Classes,' *Architectural Review*, XCIII (May 1943).

³¹ Tarn, *Working-class Housing*, 37.

³² W. Bardwell, *Healthy Homes, and How to Make Them* (London, 1854), 8.

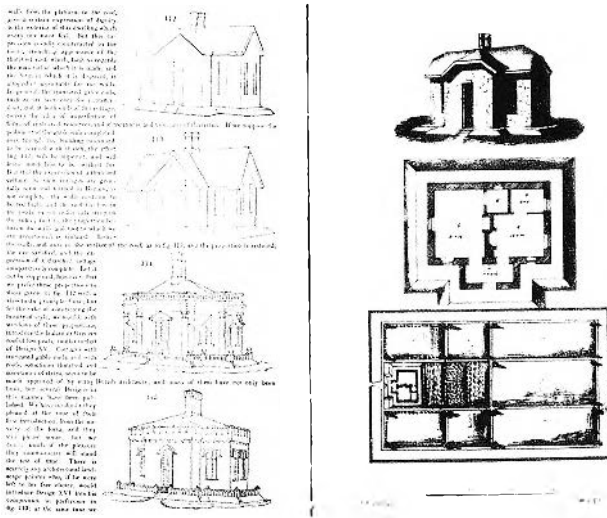


FIGURE 15. John Claudius Loudon, *Cottage Designs*, 1833. From *Encyclopædia of Cottage Architecture*, plate XVI and figures 112-15 (Photo: Edinburgh University Library).

ble. The basic aesthetic qualities of architecture came from form and proportion. Superadded style was a way of appealing directly to the associations and prejudices of the public, but the beauty of abstract form he recognized as primary.³³ For the ordinary cottage, however, utility was the main consideration; furthermore, Loudon rejected what he considered to be the misuse of stylistic badger. In the 1842 supplement to the *Encyclopædia* he wrote:

Formerly, the doctrine used to be, that the dwelling of the cottager ought to be low, in order to be expressive of humility; and void of exterior ornaments except creepers and flowers, to express the conditions of life, or, in other words, the poverty of the inhabitant. But the cottager is now becoming a reading and thinking being. ... The time has gone by for one class of society to endeavour to mark another with any badge whatever ... we would wish all architects, when designing cottages to abandon their long-received ideas.³⁴

In Loudon the diversity and originality associated with the development of the cottage idea were systematically illustrated and promoted. The cottage had become an index to the growth of interest in a multitude of styles and an increasingly sophisticated rendering of those styles. Furthermore, it revealed the fruitful interaction of picturesque and classical principles, and this was to become one of the foundations for the development of modern architecture. Loudon also witnessed, and enthusiastically accepted, the rapidly changing composition of British society and did his utmost to promote parallel changes in design.

The cottage idea from the middle of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the

Victorian years reflected the preoccupations of the times: agricultural improvement and the creation of the picturesque landscape, informal country living as a contrast to grandeur and formality, the growth of an urban middle class with a desire for not only modest country retreats, and also the suburban compromise between town and country. All of these found appropriate expression in variations on the vernacular cottage.

With cottage theory emerged two stylistic ideas of great future importance. One linked functional design to freedom in planning and the picturesque form and, on at least one occasion, to unornamented exteriors of a prophetic austerity. The other established the rustic cottage as the stylistic archetype of the modest home, irregular in outline, with pitched roof, sheltering eaves, casement windows, and honeysuckle by the door. As a type it can be followed through many Victorian designs for cottages, rectories, and other middle-class houses, to the architecture of the Arts and Crafts movement, the Garden City, and, as Scully has shown, to the domestic architecture of Richardson, Wright, and others. The small house presented architects of the Modern Movement with a crucial design test which many now feel they failed. Roots of both their successes and failures can be found in the cottage tradition.

³³ The associationist element in Loudon's theory is discussed in George L. Hersey, *High Victorian Gothic: A Study in Associationism* (Baltimore, 1972). Hersey fails to establish the roots of associationism in David Hartley, *Observations on Man* and in earlier British writers such as Locke.

³⁴ Loudon, *First Additional Supplement to Loudon's Encyclopædia* (London, 1842), 1193.