Kenwood House, Hampstead, NW3
English Heritage
Reconstruction of the Sham Bridge

Design and Access Statement

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Architects

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This brief statement supports our Listed Building Consent application, on behalf of English Heritage, to dismantle the decayed Sham Bridge across the east end of Kenwood's Thousand Pound Pond, and reconstruct it to matching appearance and materials but with improved weathering details.

1. The Setting

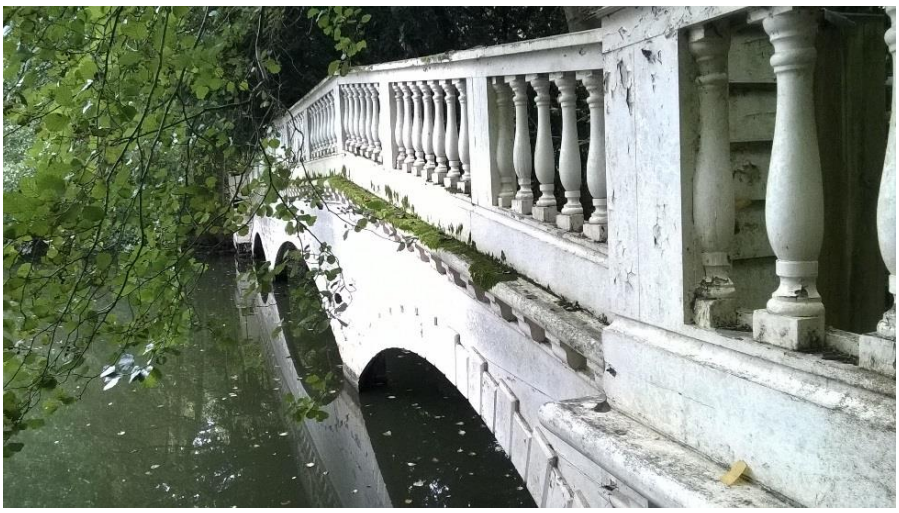
1.1 The history of the site is described in EH's January 2018 Heritage Impact Assessment, recounting the only 18th century reference to the structure in Humphrey Repton's Red Book, in which he observes '…..that the Sham Bridge however beautiful from some parts of the terrace, yet as it is a deception so frequently liable to be detected, I think it is an object beneath the dignity of Kenwood, and this might possibly be remedied.' Written in 1793 for the recently succeeded 2nd Earl Mansfield, Repton's observation certainly implies (and none too diplomatically), that the bridge was put up for the 2nd Earl's uncle, William Murray, whose architect for the mansion's remodelling in the 1770's was Robert Adam, assisted by his brother James. However, Repton's Red Book also refers to the contemporary stone bridge, further westward up-pond, which he attributes to James 'Athenian' Stuart, This has naturally led to the suggestion that Stuart may have been the architect for the Sham Bridge, although no historic drawings have ever been found to support either or any claim.

1.2 The setting of what should be described as the ornamental bridge at Kenwood is quite different from the more robust masonry deceptions put up for picturesque effect in contemporary 18th century parks such as Osterley, where Robert Adam's classical bridge was designed to be seen in passing from several view-points along the slow extended drive to the house. By contrast at Kenwood, the white-painted timber stage prop was and is entirely framed by trees and water on the edge of rising woodland, and can be seen, as clearly intended, only from across the lake and, to best advantage of the landscaped garden as Arcadian painted scene, from the mansion's south terrace at the top of the sloping Pasture Ground to the north. Although the view of London over the lowest cleft in the woodland would originally have been clearer and more compact than now, there is nothing in its immediate surroundings to suggest that the Sham Bridge was ever intended to be seen other than from the west and northwest, across the water. The fact that it remains convincingly framed by mature and beautiful trees, and that their natural stoop still focuses the view on the City when seen from the higher ground of Kenwood's House and terrace, is testament as much to

the skilful ongoing management of the estate as it is to the brilliance of its original laying-out and design.

2. The Existing Bridge

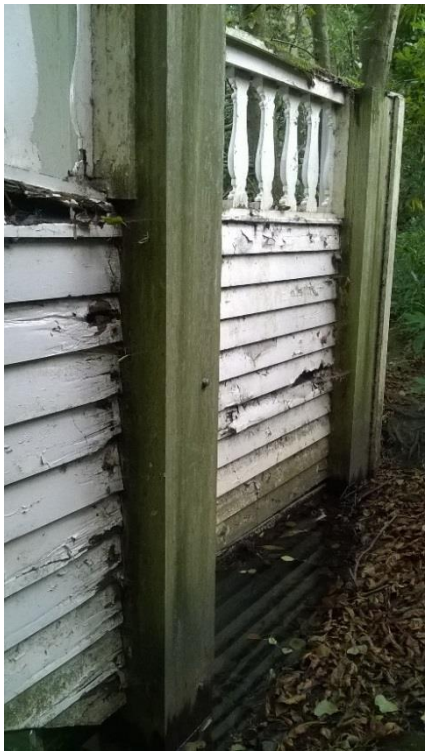
2.1 Although constructed largely for two-dimensional effect, as described above, nevertheless the Sham Bridge was certainly intended to look convincing, both in surface modelling and classical detail, when seen across the water. With well-proportioned vertical order from plinth to plain ashlar, rising through modillioned cornice to its crowning balustrade, visually strengthened by rusticated arch voussoirs and abutment piers, the west façade is skillfully put together to look like crisp white masonry, which at this location and date would mean Portland Stone.



2.2 The challenge to maintaining its sharpness of appearance has been considerable over many generations and several rebuilds, including a long period in the 20th century when the structure was founded on mini concrete piles. There is a danger that successive restorations would risk losing or diluting original classical detail on the façade, as well as potentially altering the overall setting-out, when the six support posts themselves have been altered or replaced. Fortunately, for the purpose of the current project, which does involve the full replacement of all the supports and superstructure, there are sufficient number and variety of 20th century archive design and record drawings available to check and compare the existing albeit dilapidated appearance with its previous construction, detailing and measured setting-out.

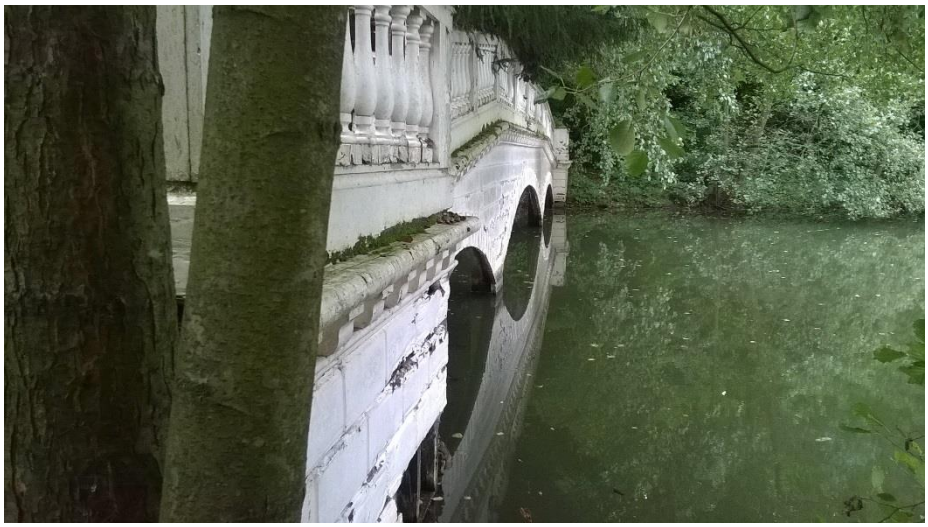
2.3 Frustratingly, the last known survey, in 1993, records the then decayed Sham Bridge as existing, in detail, but is not followed by any known design drawings or photographs which would have shown how the bridge was repaired and re-supported in the mid 1990's. What is clear, however, is that there was no attempt in that reconstruction to improve the joinery weathering details. This has resulted in fundamental, terminal decay and loss of material elements on all parts of the bridge, including the six support posts, and has produced the current scheme for reconstruction, which concentrates on refining the joinery details and water protection, as well as the timber and paintwork specification. Previous finely-drawn

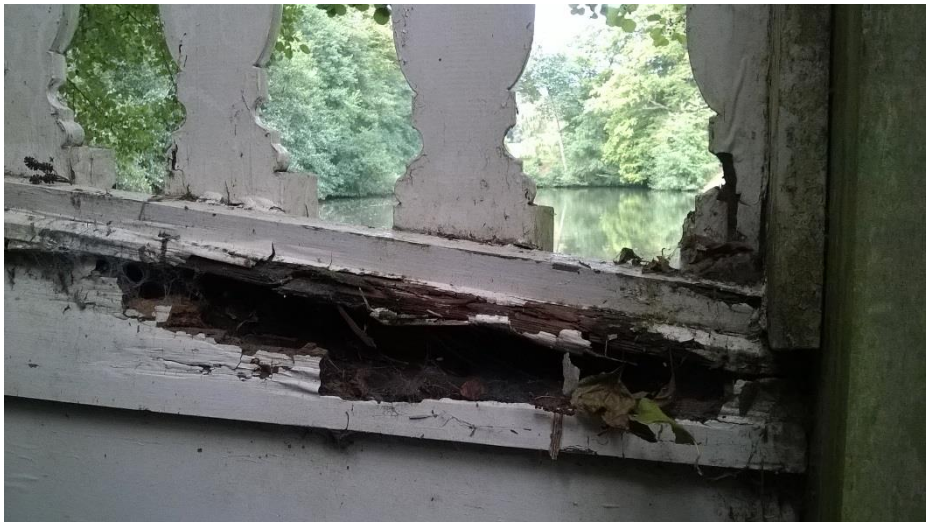
surveys from the 1960's have helped our development of the proposed joinery details, and have provided a check on the overall setting-out, spacing and size of the individual parts of the west façade, so that we can be confident that continuity of appearance will be maintained.



3. The Proposed Reconstruction

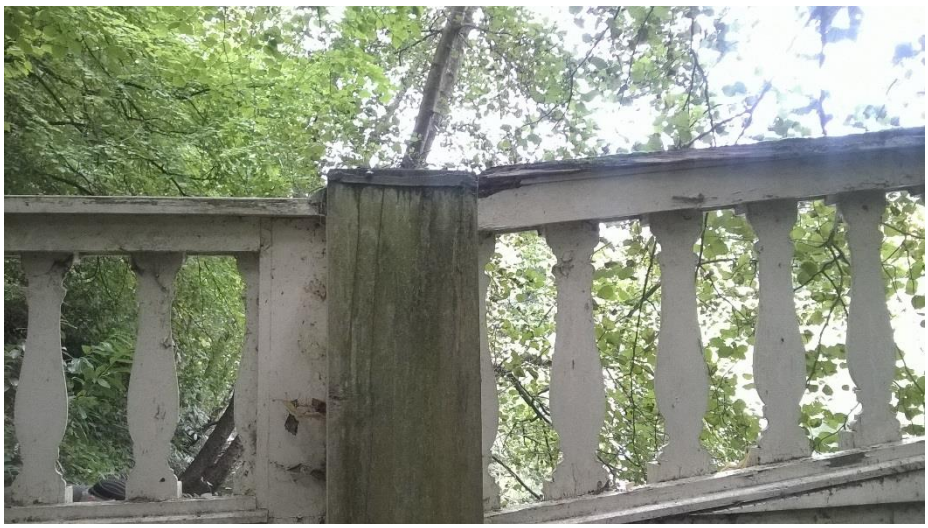
3.1 As can be seen from recent photographs, the horizontal ledges, i.e. balustrade sills, cornice projections, rusticated offsets and copings, have all suffered deep decay due to insufficient weathering slopes, moisture entrapment (e.g. against balustrade planted rear locating battens), unprotected end-grain and base timbers permanently in contact with wet ground or water.





3.2 Starting with the ledges, the projecting cornice will be carved to the same curved profile as existing, supported on identical modillion brackets. The upper ledge of the cornice will be inclined slightly more to slope down and away from the parapet plinth, to shed moisture quickly. Above the parapet plinth, the flat section of the balustrade sill will be altered to a shallow and equal ridge coping profile, to shed water efficiently away from the baluster bases; the western outer edge of the sill will have the same thickness as the existing sill, but rise almost imperceptibly to the ridge. The baluster bases will be cut to a blunt 'V' accordingly.

3.3 The parapet balustrade coping itself will be as existing, but cut with more efficient water drips either side, and will be capped with lead, as previously. The lead will be treated with patination oil and surface deterrent to keep the grey squirrels away.



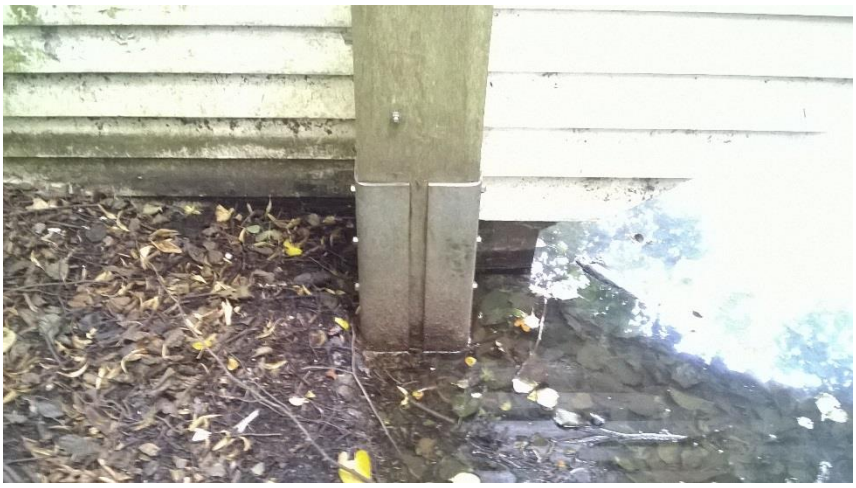
3.4 On the cladding of the reconstructed bridge, the rear, east side rebated feather-edged weather boarding will be as existing, in slow-grown close-grained Baltic Pine, protected by the throated overhang of the balustrade sill and abutment pier cornice architrave. The west side 'ashlar' cladding will be as existing in thickness and coursing gauge, but will be cut with a weathered rebate to protect the frame and

fixings and shed moisture from its flush joints. The rusticated arch voussoirs and abutment pier cladding will be similarly jointed with weathered rebates, as will the vertical joints between cladding boards at the internal and external angles of the north and south abutment piers.

3.5 Significantly, at the base of the north and south piers, and at each of the four springing points of the arches, the west side panels are to replicated in cast glass-reinforced cement (GRC), in order to withstand contact with water and damp ground better than the prematurely decayed existing timbers. The GRC will be etch-primed, undercoated and painted to match the colour and texture of the rest of the bridge cladding, subject to approval of samples.

3.6 Internally, the support structure of the bridge will be framed much as existing, but in a proposed sequence of construction which enables all the screw fixings (stainless steel) to be driven from the frame outwards to secure the western cladding, and therefore obviate the need for pelleted surface fixings. The eastern boarding will be screwed or secret nailed through the rebate laps.

3.7 Finally, the frame is supported via stainless steel coach screws, from the six new vertical support posts, located precisely as existing, made from the highly durable 'Eki' hardwood and driven into the ground and lake bed via long stainless steel foundation angles bolted to each post corner, as existing.



3.8 Apart from the main support posts and internal superstructure frame, all the cladding and joinery will be primed and painted off-white colour, provisionally BS00A01 'Portland'.

4. Access

4.1 The design proposal does not alter the existing pedestrian public access around the lakeside site, nor the existing railings which separate the wooded banks of the pond from the sloping pasture to the north and the broad pathway to the east. The south side remains inaccessible to the public, the existing single field gate staying in use for the

estate staff and maintenance Contractors, (and for the proposed Contractor access to the reconstruction works and compound).

4.2 On and around the bridge itself, there will be no change of access or accessibility, since it will remain simply an ornamental sham.

5. Implementation

5.1 It is intended to carry out the dismantling and reconstruction works during the summer of 2018 in a sequence which starts with the damming and draining of the eastern end of the Thousand Pound Pond.

5.2 The Contractor's works compound will be set up in the semi-open ground of the lakeside, linked to the supply compound in the Estate Yard east of Kenwood Stableblock, via the existing broad pathway, and with restrictions and safeguards written in the Specification regarding timing, protection, sign posting and attendance by banksmen at each end of and along the delivery route.

5.3 Seasonal timing and protection measures concerning flora and fauna are also written in the Specification, and described in detail in the appended Ecology Assessment Report. Along with the Structural Engineer's Report (HE's Stephen Parris), the project's supporting documents are all appended to the architectural and construction drawings accompanying our application for Listed Building Consent.

Ian C Angus

I C ANGUS 26th January 2018