

A PHOTOGRAMMETRIC SURVEY AND RECONSTRUCTION OF ROUSSEAU’S CAVE

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It remains a little-known fact that from March 1766 to May 1767 Jean-Jacques Rousseau – fleeing from persecution in France and Switzerland – stayed in the remote hamlet of Wootton in Staffordshire. There he composed the first half of his Confessions in a garden hermitage, a structure half natural and half architectural, ever since known as Rousseau’s Cave. Our paper records the hermitage in its current state (exposed to the elements); it creates a digital reconstruction of the hermitage as it was in Rousseau’s lifetime; and it provides digital access to a monument that is otherwise not generally accessible.

Our paper records a modest but fairly typical eighteenth-century garden hermitage and also, with the highest quality digital reconstructions and fly-throughs, provides a new insight into the creation of one of the world’s greatest works of literature.

The paper contributes substantial new material to the study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and also contributes to garden history and the phenomenon of the garden hermitage.

Keywords: Jean-Jacques Rousseau; garden history; architecture; social history; photogrammetry

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

I cannot say whether it is a natural instinct or a kind of illusion, but when we see the places where we are told that the notables of the past spent their time, it is far more moving than when we hear about their achievements or read their writings . . . It is a fact that the stimulus of place considerably sharpens and intensifies the thoughts we have about famous individuals – Cicero, *On Moral Ends*¹

The story of Rousseau’s stay in England between January 1766 and May 1767 has been told by various authors, including Leo Damrosch,² David Edmonds and John Eidinow³ and Robert Zaretsky and John T Scott.⁴ It was in England that Rousseau wrote Part I of his *Confessions*.

1. Cicero 2001, vol 2, 4.

2. Damrosch 2005.

3. Edmonds and Eidinow 2006.

4. Zaretsky and Scott 2009.

The Confessions is probably the most widely read of all Rousseau's works, and Part I in particular is generally regarded as one of the most readable and interesting works of the eighteenth century. Rousseau's ambition, declared in its opening paragraph, is renowned:

I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself.⁵

While he was certainly wrong in his prediction that he would have no imitator, it is widely agreed that Rousseau did achieve something in his *Confessions* that had never previously been achieved nor even attempted. He wrote a chronological account of his life that focused, at the most crucial junctures, upon his own emotions.

Rousseau wrote under difficult conditions. He had originally come to England to flee public opinion. He had been seeking sanctuary of some sort ever since the mob had thrown stones at the windows of his house Môtiers in Neuchâtel in September 1765. On the continent, Voltaire had stirred up opinion against him, but Rousseau was hopeful that by moving to England and to Wootton in Staffordshire he might get away from malevolent intrigue. However, even in Wootton, in the parish of Ellastone, in rural Staffordshire, where he stayed from 22 March 1766 to 1 May 1767, peace of mind was hard to come by. He worried, for example, that his erstwhile friend David Hume might be plotting against him and that the servants too were in league with his enemies and were spying on him. It did not help that he spoke hardly any English.

He took refuge in memories of his youth, which he recorded in his study, a place that has ever since been known as Rousseau's Cave. It was in Rousseau's Cave (52°59'56"N 1°50'04"W; Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference SK 11207 44619) that he wrote Part I of *The Confessions*. Rousseau himself never described the cave, but he left a brief description of Wootton and the surrounding countryside:

Imagine, Madam, an isolated house, not large, but well-kept, built half-way up the side of a valley . . . replete with rocks and trees which offer delightful nooks, and which at certain places are far enough from the stream to allow one to walk comfortably along its banks, sheltered from the winds and even from the rain, so that in awful weather I go can botanize peacefully beneath the rocks and in the company of the sheep and the rabbits.⁶

Much of the landscape remains relatively unchanged today. 'The present pattern of hedged and walled fields was fully established by the eighteenth century when the estate was famous for its damson orchards.'⁷ '[T]he streams and woodland walks below the site, which Rousseau remembered with fondness and where he botanised, are still there and suggestive of that Romantic atmosphere he craved.'⁸ However, the house that Rousseau knew no longer exists, for, following the sale of its fixtures and fittings in 1930, in 1931 the remains of the house were demolished as it had become unsafe.⁹ The only eighteenth-

5. Rousseau 1782 [2008], 17.

6. Letter to Madame de Luze, 10 May 1766, in Zaretsky and Scott 2009, 139.

7. 'As late as the 1860s damsons were still grown in large quantities at Wootton for commercial markets'; Cruickshank and Robinson 1999.

8. Mowl and Barre 2009, 130–1.

9. Dodds and Dodds 1967.

century structure that now remains is Rousseau's Cave. This feature, half natural and half architectural, still exists in the grounds of the new Wootton Hall, which was built upon the site of the earlier house in 2002.

The cave in origin is an entirely natural feature, consisting of a hollowed outcrop of sandstone bedrock, but this was embellished by the first owner of Wootton House, Rousseau's landlord, Richard Davenport (*c* 1705–71). Our principal objective in this article is the archaeological exploration and recording of this cave.¹⁰ It will be argued that the architectural history of the cave can be divided into three distinct phases. From *c* 1750 to 1837/8, in keeping with the fashion of the time, the cave existed as a free-standing small stone hermitage in the garden. In 1837/8, after the fashion for hermitages had passed, the cave was encased within a terrace and at the same time extensive additions were made to the house. (It was from this date that the house began to be more often known as Wootton Hall. Previously it was usually Wootton House or simply Wootton.) In 1930, when Wootton Hall was demolished, the facing stones of the terrace were removed, and from then until the building of the present Wootton Hall in 2002 the cave was allowed to fall into a state of ruin.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The cave is not currently under any immediate threat. However, since the 1930 sale – and the subsequent removal of the surrounding masonry – it has been open to the elements, and is thus to some extent prone to natural erosion. It should also be mentioned that it is on private land. All of these factors influenced our decision to carry out a photogrammetric survey. In summary, our aims have been: to record Rousseau's Cave in its current state (in 2022); to create a digital reconstruction of the cave as it was in Rousseau's lifetime; and to provide digital access to a monument that is otherwise not easily accessible.

In order to accurately record Rousseau's Cave as it is now, a number of stand-alone photographs were taken and a photogrammetric survey was carried out. In order to create a digital reconstruction of the cave as it was in Rousseau's lifetime, including subsequent alterations, we have made use of a range of data, comprising early twentieth-century photographs of the original Wootton Hall; the memories of Lee Mackay and Simon Manby, who first visited the cave in 1968; the memories of the late William Podmore OBE (1917–2018) of Consall Hall in Staffordshire, who visited Wootton Hall as a boy in 1930 during the sale; Erasmus Darwin's record of 'An Inscription over the Chimney of an Hermitage'; the results of the photogrammetric survey. Comparisons have also been made to parallel examples of monuments of a similar style, function and date.

PHOTOGRAMMETRY SURVEY DETAILS

A significant limitation of photogrammetry is that the quality of the scan is very dependent on the lighting conditions at the time the photographs are made. We were fortunate that

10. A search of the Historic Environment Record and the Archaeological Data Service reveals that there have been no previous attempts to make an accurate record of the cave.

lighting conditions were almost ideal on the day of the survey (28 July 2022): flat low contrast light with limited shadows but bright enough to avoid under-exposure.

A series of traditional survey photographs were made with 2m and 1m scales. Following this, the photogrammetry survey was conducted. Software readable markers had been printed on paper in advance. Six of these markers were fixed to the ground using tent pegs. The distances between the markers were measured in centimetres and recorded. During the process of generating a 3D digital model, the distances between markers as measured on site were entered into the software to ensure the model was scaled accurately and free of geometrical distortion. The 1,483 high resolution images were used to generate a 3D digital model with realistic textures derived from the original photographs. A workflow was developed to extract the maximum amount of detail from the images, both in the geometry of the 3D model and the texture images used to colour the model for rendering (see supplementary material, Appendix 2, for details). The model created by the photogrammetry workflow was brought into Maya, an animation and rendering application, where images and animations were rendered. This involves the creation of virtual cameras and lights, which are used to generate images of the model in much the same way a studio photographer would set up cameras and artificial lighting. The 3D rendering process allows fine control of the lighting, as well as camera and lens characteristics, locations and motion. This provides a quick and economical way to create high quality images and video which, if shot traditionally on site, would have involved a large crew and the most expensive tools used by the motion picture industry such as large-scale lighting, camera jibs, booms, dollies and drones.

Photogrammetry derived images in the relevant sections of this paper were all rendered from the same model, using both orthographic and perspective projections. In addition, an animation was rendered presenting a fly-through of the site as it was in 2022 with lighting and soundtrack manipulated to create a sense of the atmosphere inside the cave at the time that Rousseau was using it. This animation was included in the project video, which may be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/stephenhilyard/rousseau-cave-reconstruction>.

RESULTS

Rousseau's Cave – as it is (2022)

The ruins of the cave are accessed through a narrow, roofless passage between a free-standing rock outcrop (referred to below as the 'Main Outcrop') that forms the southern side of the cave and another outcrop to the west (figs 1 and 2). Steps in the passage lead to a narrow stone doorway (there is no door) with a lintel supported by short square stone columns at either end. The inner faces of the columns are flat, indicating that the doorway once held a door (see fig 4). (In fact, strictly speaking, the Main Outcrop and the Western Outcrop are part of the same enormous rock, for the uppermost step connects them without any division.) The eastern column is supported by a ledge on the Main Outcrop. The western column is supported on rough masonry which partially creates the western wall of the passage.

The interior of the cave is a roofless space of about five square metres enclosed by the Main Outcrop to the south and further outcrops (currently obscured by foliage) to the west



Fig 1. View from the east (2m scale). *Photograph: authors.*

and north. The eastern side of the cave is open. Built into the wall facing the doorway there is a very small fireplace approximately 50cm high and 30cm wide (fig 3, and see fig 12). Above the fireplace, the top of the mantelpiece is just 8cm in depth, above which there is a recess which leans back at an angle of 80 degrees. To the right of the fireplace are three alcoves approximately 1m high with widths varying from 50cm to 30cm. The western wall, to the left of the fireplace is recessed and encrusted with imported tufa (fig 4).

Orthographic images rendered from the photogrammetry survey show details of the spaces (figs 5–11). A level course of masonry blocks is seated on a ledge carved into the Main Outcrop (see figs 9 and 13). The bottom bed of this course of masonry aligns vertically with the bottom of the lintel over the doorway and is supported at its western end by the same column that supports the lintel (see figs 9 and 13). This level bed can be traced around the remainder of the cave; we will refer to it below as the 'Base Bed'. A recess above the fireplace is topped by another lintel, also aligned with the lintel over the doorway and the Base Bed (fig 12). The Base Bed continues to the right of the fireplace in the masonry above the alcoves (see fig 8). It is clear that this continuous level bed around the entire structure was the base for a masonry roof structure which is now largely missing. On the south side of the cave two additional courses of rough masonry sit on the base course clearly forming the spring point for a barrel vault. The other side of the barrel vault can be detected in the remaining masonry above the alcoves (see fig 7) on the north side of the cave. At the western end of the cave masonry remaining above the Base Bed indicates that the barrel vault once ended in an irregular half dome springing from the Base Bed (see figs 8 and 9).

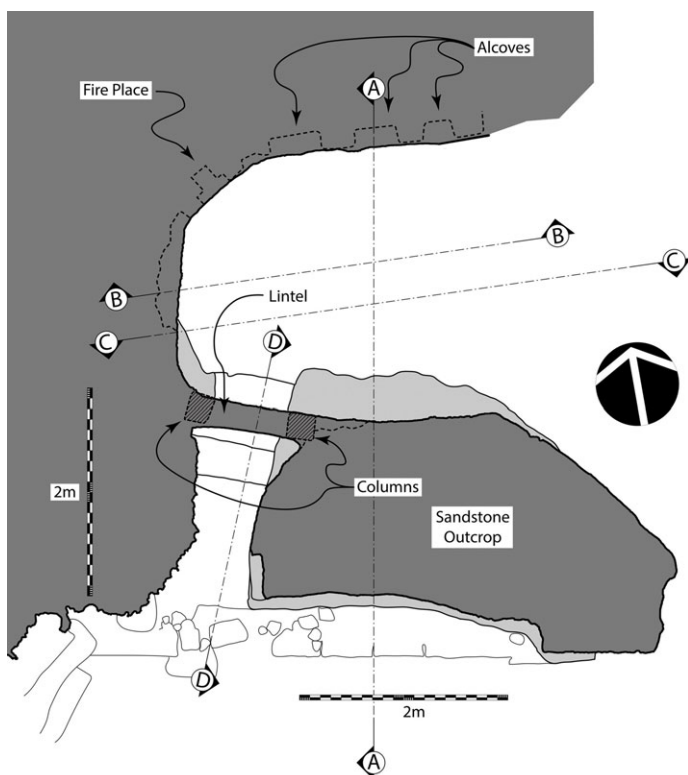


Fig 2. Plan at base course of roof structure. *Plan*: authors.



Fig 3. Fireplace and alcoves (2m and 1m scales). *Photograph*: authors.



Fig 4. Recessed area with tufa. *CGI Rendering*: authors.



Fig 5. South elevation, orthographic projection. *CGI Rendering*: authors.

A number of small artificial stalactites are still visible on what remains of the roof masonry, most obviously on the south side of the cave (figs 13 and 14). Traces of stucco can be found in many places on the masonry (although not on any part of the Main Outcrop). Tufa pieces encrust the walls in places, particularly the recessed area to the left of the



Fig 6. East elevation, orthographic projection. *CGI Rendering: authors.*

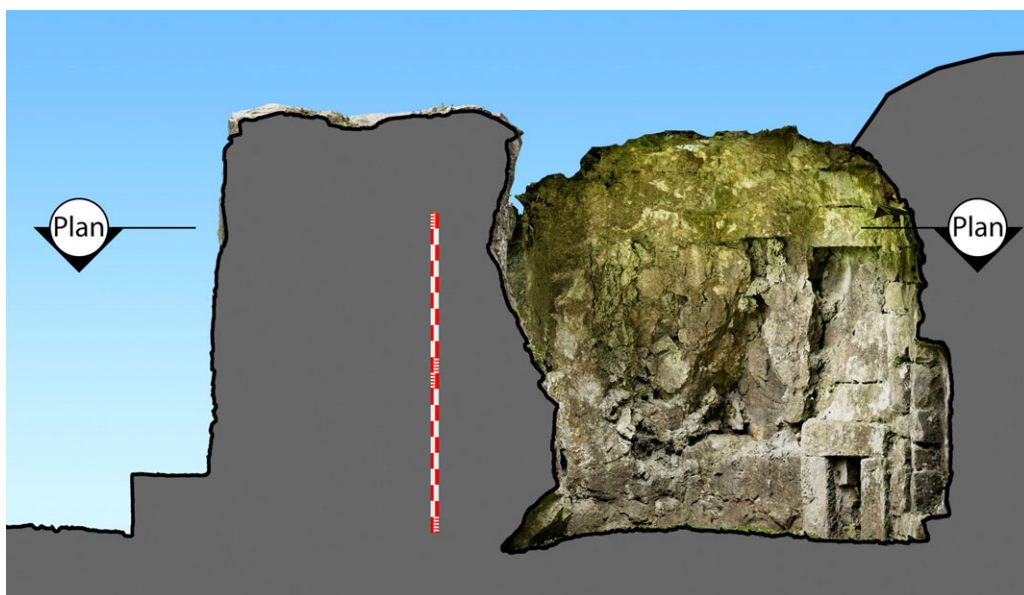


Fig 7. Section AA, orthographic projection. *CGI Rendering: authors.*

fireplace. A few pieces of tufa remain cemented to the backs of the alcoves (see figs 8 and 12) and the recess above the fireplace (see fig 12).

Nothing remains of the eastern wall except for a short section of 80cms that was entirely covered in undergrowth at the time of our visit (see fig 28).



Fig 8. Section BB, orthographic projection. *CGI Rendering*: authors.



Fig 9. Section CC, orthographic projection. *CGI Rendering*: authors.



Fig 10. Section DD, orthographic projection through passageway. *CGI Rendering*: authors.



Fig 11. Perspective view of entrance. *CGI Rendering*: authors.



Fig 12. Fireplace and alcoves. *CGI Rendering*: authors.



Fig 13. Base course of the roof on the south wall (interior). *CGI Rendering*: authors.

Tool marks made by a mason's point chisel are clearly visible in various locations. The point chisel is the first 'roughing out' tool used by a mason or stone carver. It removes material quickly and leaves clear grooves following the path of the tool. These tool marks are visible on either wall of the passage (see figs 4 and 10). Similar tools marks are visible on the top and south side of the Main Outcrop.



Fig 14. Detail of artificial stalactites on the south wall (interior), 1m scale. *CGI Rendering*: authors.

Rousseau's Cave – as it was

The history of the cave falls into three distinct chronological phases (i) 1930–the present; (ii) 1837/8–1930; (iii) *c* 1750–1837/8. These are described in reverse chronological order.

1930–the present

The earliest photographs of the cave's interior that we have found are those taken by Murray Forsyth for his article in *Country Life* in 1979 (fig 15).¹¹ At that time the cave was seldom visited and, as can be seen, nature was taking over. This contrasts with how it appears today. The vegetation has been cleared away from the cave, with the exception of large quantities of ivy, and it stands upon a well-kept lawn. Rocks have been piled up against its western side to form a rockery and the northern side forms part of a modern terrace.

The current owner only knows the cave from shortly before the present-day Wootton Hall was built in 2002. However, Lee Mackay and Simon Manby of Forge Farm Studio in Wootton paid their first visit to the cave in 1968, when they first moved to the village. Although in 1966 a local journalist had already recorded that the cave was 'still there in remnants',¹² in 1968 there was substantially more remaining than today. The deterioration of the cave that has occurred since 1930 is probably due to a mixture of souvenir hunting and natural erosion. Lee and Simon recall about twelve groups of artificial stalactites attached to the interior walls of the cave (with two or three stalactites in each group). There now remain just six groups – much eroded. The stalactites were not carved, but were made of a grey stucco, all modelled in relief and not in the round. Today, their remains can be

11. Forsyth 1979.

12. *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 15 Apr 1966.

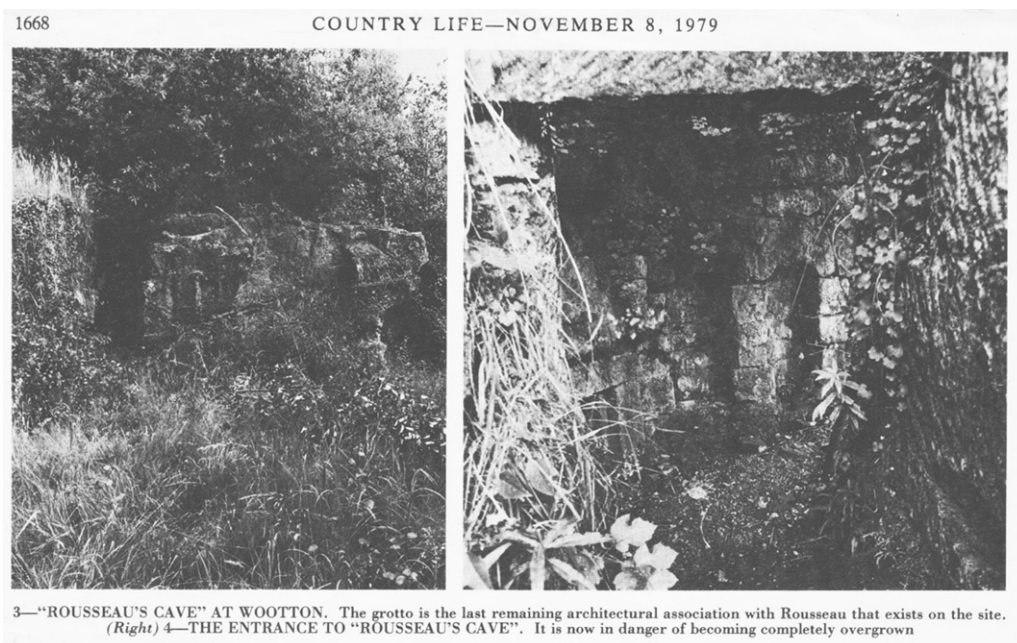


Fig 15. Murray Forsyth's photographs of Rousseau's Cave. Photograph: Forsyth 1979.

seen on the southern and western walls of the cave attached to the stones that constituted the first course of the cave's domed roof. Simon Manby, a sculptor, suggests that, as they were not identical in size or shape, they might have been cast from a mould and then modified *in situ*. In length they were between 5cm to 10cm, and in depth no more than 4cm. In appearance they may originally have been similar to the artificial stalactites on the seventeenth-century grotto wall at Wallenstein Palace Garden in Prague (Czechia).

Lee and Simon recall that there were also about twelve clear crystals randomly embedded into the walls of the cave. Although no longer *in situ*, one of these survives (see image in supplementary material). It is a calcite crystal (2.5cms \times 1.8cms \times 0.8cms) of the variety known as Iceland spar or optical crystal.¹³

Other than the partial remains of its first course, the cave's domed roof no longer exists, but in 1968 a portion of it still survived, above the fireplace wall. It was built entirely of dressed local sandstone. Although the surviving first course of the roof is roughly curved at the western end, it is much straighter along the southern and northern ends, with a wide-angled corner at the north-east; all of which suggests a roughly oblong roof but not one that followed any strict geometric pattern.

1837/8–1930

On 19 December 1929 Wootton Hall, together with 53 acres, was offered for auction. It was advertised as 'suitable for a school, institution or pleasure estate'. However, it failed to meet its reserve price of £3,500. The bidding did not rise any higher than £2,500.¹⁴ It was

13. Thanks to Dr Ian Stimpson of Keele University for advice on these crystals.

14. John Rylands Library.

then hoped to raise a higher price by selling off the fixtures and fittings of the house individually. An auction was held at the house on 27 and 28 February and 1 March 1930. Saturday 1 March was devoted to the sale of 'Outdoor Effects'. However, it was the start of the Depression and again bidding was disappointingly slow. The total realised was £2,290.¹⁵

Among the 'outdoor effects' sold on 1 March for £5 was lot 689 (of 775): 'The Stone-built Rousseau's Cave'.¹⁶ It was bought by William Podmore Snr (?–1958) of Consall Hall near Stoke-on-Trent. The payment of £5 presumably entitled him to any parts of the cave that could be physically removed. He took away the cave's exterior ashlar facing stones, which were carefully reassembled at Consall Hall, so as to make a replica of the cave's exterior. He also bought a rose tent (or bower), which he later sold back to the previous owners of Wootton Hall, the Bromley Davenports, and an oak staircase, which he installed at Consall Hall.

Fortuitously, it was not a school day, and his twelve-year-old son accompanied him to the sale. In 2016–17 we interviewed his son, William Podmore OBE (1917–2018), about his memories of the cave. He remembered it as having a vaulted dome-shaped ceiling, at the centre of which was a sealed hatch about 2ft in diameter. Furthermore, there was originally a free-standing stone bench that, in 1930, stood against the western wall of the cave to the left of the fireplace and an interior east-facing window connecting the cave with a passageway that extended from the house. (By 1968 the eastern wall had almost entirely disappeared.) The 25'-to-a-mile ordnance survey map (1892–1914), combined with photographic evidence of fig 16, suggest that, although it may have been contiguous with a passageway in the house, the passageway seen by young Mr Podmore would have extended from the main part of the house by only about 2–3m. Mr Podmore created a rough sketch of the of the window (or windows), divided by a stone mullion, connecting the cave to the house (see supplementary material for image). In fig 17 Mr Podmore's rough sketch of the windows and mullion has been transposed onto the open eastern side of the present-day cave and his imperial measurements have been converted to metric.

At Consall Hall, the place where the ashlar facing stones were initially reassembled was found to be prone to flooding and so in 1960 they were again carefully reassembled, by William Podmore Jnr, at their current location on the pond terrace (see supplementary material for image).

The accuracy of the Podmores' reconstruction can be seen when it is compared to a pre-1908 photograph of the cave (see fig 16). That the photograph predates 1908 can be deduced from the fact that another photograph of the cave from the south-west (see supplementary material) was published that year in Collins' *Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau in England*¹⁷ and the *Illustrated London News*.¹⁸ The vegetation and flowers in this photograph are in exactly the same positions as the vegetation and flowers in the photograph taken from the straight-on position. Both photographs were probably taken by the local photographers R and R Bull, a business based in nearby Ashbourne that traded between 1904 and 1913. (They made a postcard from the photograph.¹⁹)

15. The remainder of the estate, 2,524 acres, was also offered for sale in 1929, but it failed to sell. It remained in the hands of the Bromley Davenport family until it was sold after the Second World War to Mr R P Silcock. It was bought by the trustees of the present owner, Mr J Greenall, in 1998 (Cruickshank and Robinson 1999).

16. John Rylands Library. Bromley-Davenport Muniments, box 109.

17. Collins 1908.

18. *Illustrated London News*, 11 Apr 1908.

19. Robert Bull senior began working as a photographer in 1876. He was joined by his nephew in 1904: Payne nd.



Fig 16. The entrance to Rousseau's Cave. *Photograph: Staffordshire Record Office 4463-9-4.*

Using the pre-1908 photographs of the cave's exterior (fig 16) and the reconstruction at Consall Hall, it is a relatively straightforward process to digitally transpose the reconstructed ashlar facing stones back into their original position against cave's southern exterior wall (fig 18).

However, the photographs of the cave (fig 16) and of the house (fig 19) and Mr Podmore's reconstruction (fig 17) only take us back to the early Victorian period. For it was then that the terrace was constructed over the top of the cave. This is apparent from the comments of Bernard Burke in *A Visitation of the Seats and Arms of the Noblemen and Gentlemen of Great Britain*.²⁰ Burke was invited into the house to view the art collection of the Rev Davenport Bromley (1787–1862). The Rev Davenport Bromley, the grandson of Richard Davenport, was the only owner of Wootton Hall who ever spent much time there. Other owners preferred to spend most of their time at Capesthorpe Hall and Calveley Hall in Cheshire. The Rev Davenport Bromley was vicar of the nearby village of Ellastone from 1811 to 1830, and he inherited the house from his father, Davies Davenport (1757–1837). Following the death of his father, extensive rebuilding took place, mainly in the years 1837 and 1838 and continuing to 1842,²¹ under the direction of the architect Thomas Trubshaw (1802–42),²² who may have been influenced by the recent Italianate re-rendering of nearby Trentham Hall.

According to Burke: 'Until the taste and wealth of the present Mr Davenport Bromley erected this new, handsome and spacious mansion, Wootton was an old and small house,

20. Burke 1854.

21. John Rylands Library. Bromley-Davenport Muniments, box 109.

22. Cruikshank and Robinson 1999.

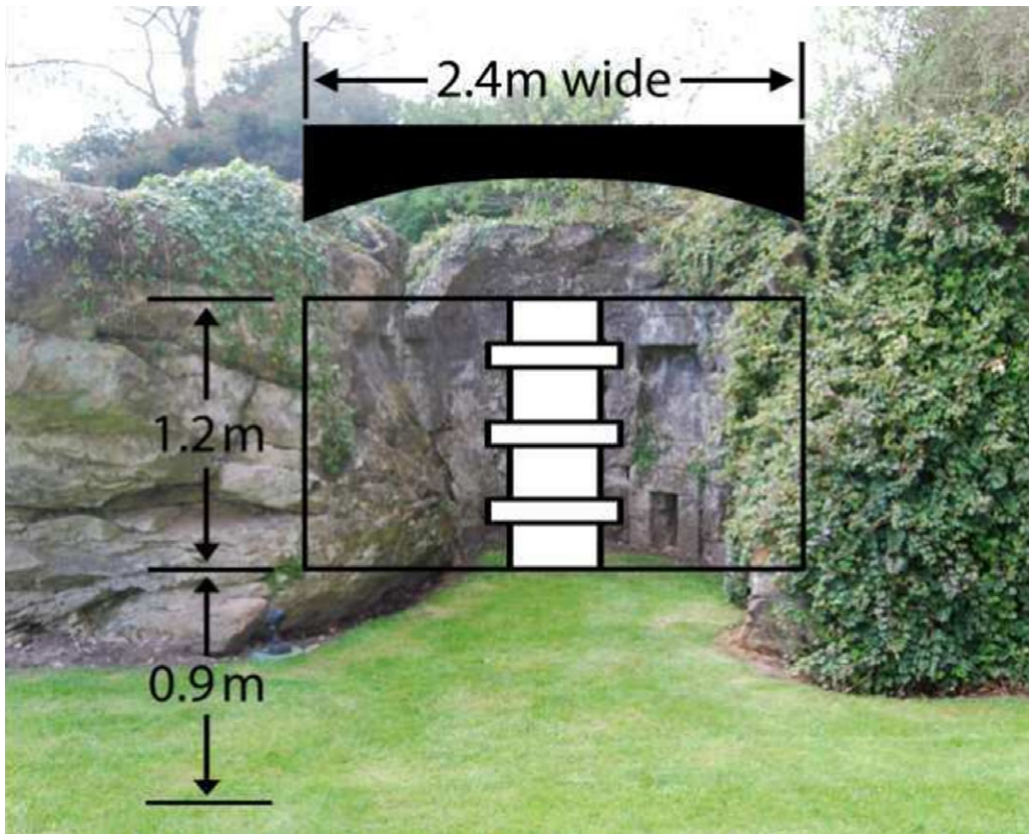


Fig 17. The window in relation to the rest of the cave. *Photograph: authors.*

seldom inhabited by the family.’²³ The present owner ‘fixed his residence here, and added a handsome Mansion, in the Italian style of architecture, to the small original house’.²⁴ He then lets slip a remark that is crucial in understanding the history of the cave. Rousseau ‘wrote his ‘confessions’ in a grotto, which has been built over in erecting a flight of steps which leads to the principal entrance’²⁵ (our italics).

No previous writers on Rousseau’s stay in Wootton have realised that the exterior of the cave was entirely different prior to the Rev Davenport Bromley’s ‘improvements’. Courtois in 1910 records, presumably from local legend, that ‘Rousseau’s apartment was located on the first floor at the back of the house’,²⁶ but no one seems to have informed him that the exterior of the cave that he saw, and that is shown in old photographs – and much of the rebuilt and expanded house – would have been unrecognisable to Rousseau.²⁷

23. Burke 1854, 23.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Courtois 1910, 35.

27. In my own earlier writings on the cave, I had not realised that the facing stones were only early Victorian – Stephen Leach.

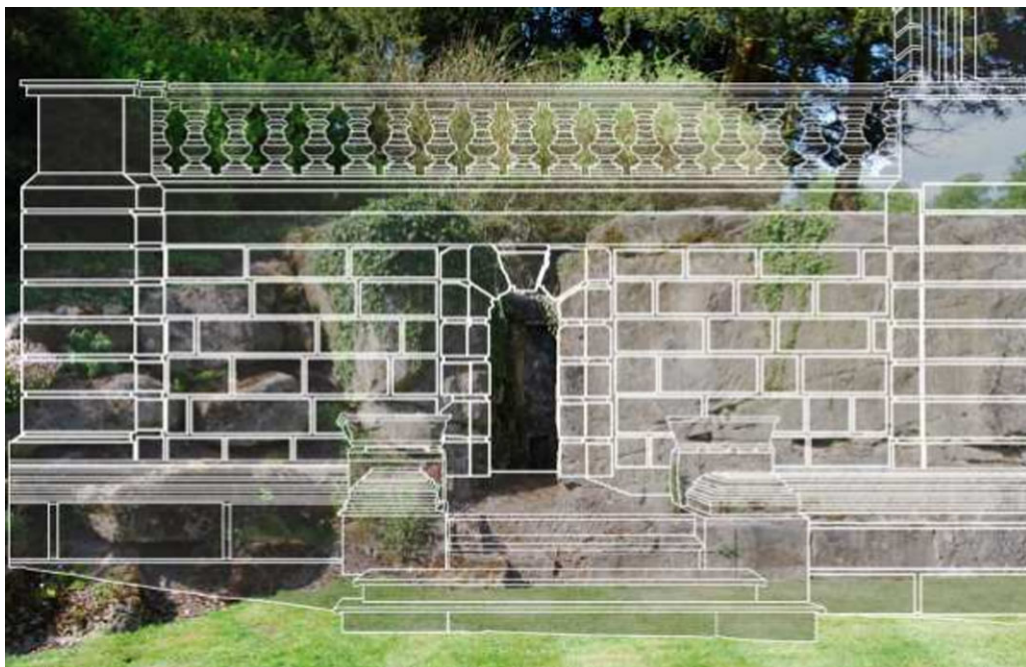


Fig 18. Digital overlay. *Photograph:* Dr Kirsten Leach.

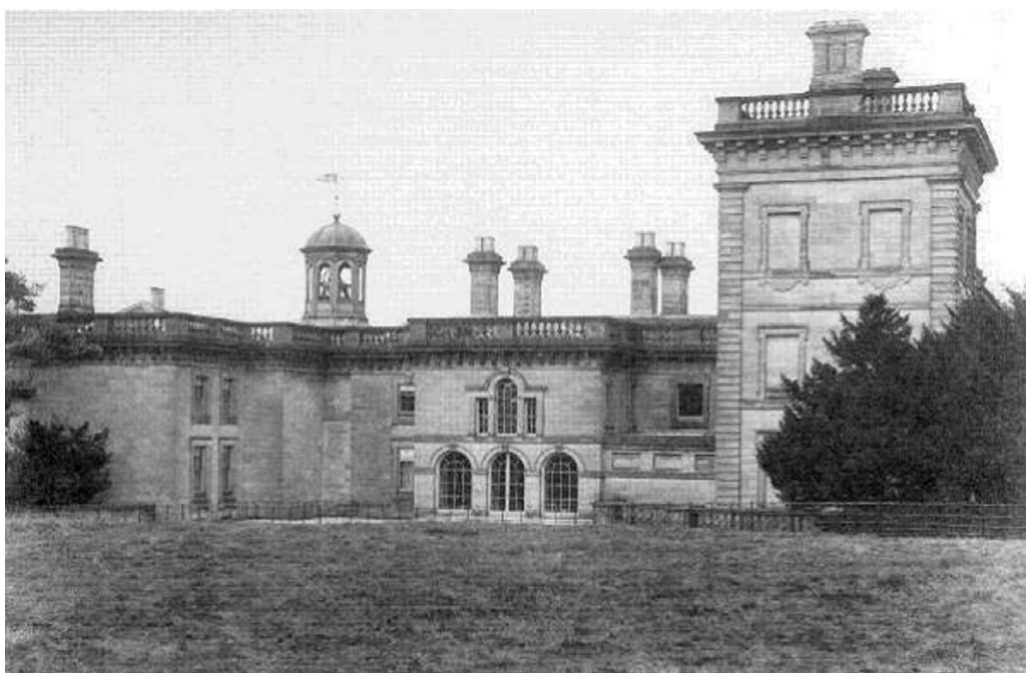


Fig 19. Wootton Hall from the north. *Photograph:* Collins 1908.

The above remarks by Bernard Burke imply that the facing stones (and probably also the oak staircase) that were bought by Mr Podmore in 1930 only date from 1837 at the earliest. They were part of the improvements that were carried out so as to create a house worthy to display an extensive collection of newly-acquired Renaissance Italian art.²⁸ Likewise, the elaborate wrought iron ‘Milanese gates’ that are now at Capesthorpe Hall, decorated with the figure of Saint Andrew, which came from Wootton Hall (and originally, according to family legend, from a monastery near Milan), were most likely bought by the Rev Davenport Bromley on one of his art-buying expeditions.²⁹ The Rev Davenport Bromley spent considerable time in Italy, but there is no record of Rousseau’s host, Richard Davenport, ever travelling abroad.

Nonetheless, despite William Podmore’s mistaken assumption about the date of the ashlar facing stones, we are deeply indebted to him for sharing his memories of the cave as it was in 1930. We only wish that we had asked him more.³⁰

c 1750–1837/8

Although there is no known picture of the house that predates the building work of 1837–8, there is an inventory that was made on 21 and 22 February 1837 following the death of its owner, Davis Davenport, on 5 February 1837.³¹ As it immediately predates the building work carried out by the Rev Davenport Bromley, and as no known work is known to have been carried out between *c* 1750 when the original house was built and 1837, when the Rev Davenport Bromley inherited it, this inventory is probably the nearest we can get to a description of the eighteenth-century house.³²

The 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey map of 1834–9³³ confirms that the original house stood on the same site as the Rev Davenport Bromley’s house; however, it was considerably smaller. The 1929 sales catalogue reveals that the servants’ wing (built 1837–42) contained ten bedrooms and that there were fifteen other bedrooms (in the main part of the house). By contrast, the 1837 inventory lists only nine bedrooms (excluding servants’ bedrooms) – the number of servants’ bedrooms pre-1837 is unknown. As the 1837 inventory makes no mention of a bell tower, we may infer that this Italianate structure was another addition from the years 1837–42. Other additions made at this time include a new billiard room and a large drawing room.³⁴

The photographs of the house suggest that the western wing – ie the westernmost rooms, protruding both southwards and northwards from the line of the house – was built in 1837–42 by the Rev Davenport Bromley. If the four bedrooms in the west wing and the

28. Cruickshank and Robinson 1999.

29. The gates are a Grade II listed monument (no. 1332955). ‘The surviving lodge at Wootton Hall was almost certainly designed by Trubshaw’ (Cruickshank and Robinson 1999). An anonymous reviewer informs us that there is a monastery dedicated to Saint Andrew at Vercelli, halfway between Milan and Turin, the Abbey of Santa Andrea.

30. During the late 19th century, after the death of the Rev Walter Davenport Bromley in 1862, the rooms of the house were redecorated and Italianate gardens were planted under the direction of Sir Reginald Blomfield, but no further building work was carried out (Cruickshank and Robinson 1999).

31. John Rylands Library, BDM/111/18.

32. Early 20th-century reference books (eg Masfield 1930, 132) note that the house was built *c* 1730, but Cruickshank and Robinson (1999) date the original house to *c* 1750.

33. Old series, no. 129.

34. Cruickshank and Robinson 1999.

'two bedrooms in Tower over'³⁵ are subtracted from the 1929 total of fifteen bedrooms, we arrive back at the total of nine (original) bedrooms in the house that Rousseau knew. Seven of these bedrooms were on the first floor. On the ground floor, pre-1837, there was a library, drawing room and dining room. The original house consisted of just two floors, ground floor and first floor, with the servants' rooms in the basement. There were also stables and a brewhouse arranged around a yard.³⁶ The original house would in fact have been of a similar size to that which exists on the same site today, built in 2002.

Unfortunately, the 1837 inventory makes no mention of Rousseau's Cave. However, this is not surprising for, as will be seen, the evidence points to the connecting passageway (seen by Mr Podmore) being built at the same time as the terrace. The existence of the terrace, and the assumption that this dates to Rousseau's stay, has led previous writers to think of Rousseau's Cave as a grotto, connected to the house. However, although it had some of the features of a grotto, if we free our minds of the terrace, it will be seen that in the eighteenth century the cave was not a grotto but a small self-contained hermitage.

The difference between grottoes and hermitages is sometimes vague, and sometimes, even in the eighteenth century, a hermitage might be described as a grotto, but there are significant differences. Grottoes were inspired by the shrines at sacred springs in ancient Greece and Rome. The Romans termed such a shrine a *nymphaeum*, for it was customarily dedicated to local water nymphs. The fashion was revived in sixteenth-century Italy and reached Britain in the early seventeenth century. The fashion was revived again in the early eighteenth century, coinciding with the fashion for hermitages. But, in general, a grotto was a little more sociable and frivolous than a hermitage.

By contrast, an eighteenth-century hermitage reflected a prevailing fashion for melancholy. Thus, sometimes lines from Milton's 'Il Penseroso', 'the founding text of the eighteenth-century cult of melancholy'³⁷ were inscribed upon hermitage walls:

And may at last my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage,
The hairy gown and mossy cell,
Where I may sit and rightly spell,
Of every Star that Heav'n doth shew,
And every herb that sips the dew;
Till old experience do attain
To something like prophetic strain.
These pleasure Melancholy give,
And I with thee will choose to live.

Whereas a grotto might typically be decorated with statues of nymphs, a hermitage was more likely to be decorated with *memento mori* – for example, a crucifix, a skull or an hourglass. A further difference is that a grotto is a place to visit, whereas the hermitage is, ostensibly, a place to live. There are examples of eighteenth-century owners paying for hermits to inhabit their hermitages as living illustrations of a simple contemplative life, but more usually hermitages were left in a state in which visitors might imagine that the hermit had momentarily left but might reappear at any moment.

35. 1929 Catalogue, John Rylands Library, Bromley-Davenport Muniments, box 109.

36. Cruickshank and Robinson 1999.

37. Campbell 2013, 40.

If there is one architectural feature above all others that proclaims Rousseau's Cave to be a hermitage – a place to live – rather than a grotto, it is the very small fireplace. We have been able to find only one grotto that had a fireplace: Hartburn grotto in Northumberland, which was exceptional in that it served as a swimmers' changing room.

Admittedly, the cave does have some features that are more usually associated with a grotto: the stalactites and the calcite crystals (found, for example, in the Painshill grotto dating to the 1760s and the Goldney House grotto of 1737–64). However, it has no water feature at all, nor any shell decoration. Both of these features would be expected had the cave been designed as a grotto. Moreover, the ground is well-drained: there is no hidden clay-lined pond. The decorative tufa is more often found in grottoes rather than hermitages, but its use in hermitages is not unparalleled. For example, the hermitage at Fonthill Abbey in Wiltshire was 'a circular structure made from rustic tufa'³⁸ and the hermitage at Oriel Temple in County Louth in Ireland is made partly of tufa.³⁹

Rousseau's Cave is alluded to in a poem by Voltaire, 'Guerre Civil de Geneve' (1768):

C'est de Rousseau le digne et noir Palais.
La se tapit ce sombre Energumene,
Cet enemi de la nature humaine
Petri d'orgueil et devoré de fiel.

In 1818 Stephen Weston translated this as:

There's Rousseau's cave in horrors drest
Fit mansion for a man possest.
Of hatred for God's creatures,
all Consum'd by pride, devour'd by gall.⁴⁰

That rumours of Rousseau living in a cave reached Voltaire demonstrate the contemporary demand for Rousseau-related gossip. Yet Wootton was a remote place and, dating to Rousseau's stay, there is only one eye-witness description of the cave – all too brief – dating from the eighteenth century. Mary Delaney refers to Rousseau's hermitage in a letter to her brother Bernard Granville at Calwich Abbey. Calwich is next door to Wootton, and Rousseau would often visit Granville. The two men got on well, and Granville was one of the few in the area who could speak French. The letter is dated 'Delville [Ireland] 3 July 1766'.

I hope your neighbour Rousseau entertains you; is he pleased with his own Hermitage? it is romantic enough to satisfy a genius, but not so well suited to a sentimental philosopher as to a cynic, it is rather too rude, and I should imagine Calwich much better fitted for that purpose.⁴¹

38. Ibid, 137.

39. Ibid, 160. The cave's rough stonework is comparable to that of the 'rustic temple' at Hackfall in North Yorkshire and the hewn interior is comparable to that of the caves at Hawkstone in Shropshire (under construction in 1765). Our thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing these comparisons to our attention.

40. It has been suggested that Joseph Wright's 'Philosopher by Lamplight' (1769) may have been influenced by this poem and that the philosopher in a cave depicted by Wright is intended to represent Rousseau: Leach 2023, 57–8.

41. Hall, 2011, 65.

Mrs Delany was herself a designer of grottoes and hermitages, and in the above extract she is comparing the hermitage at Wootton to that at Calwich, which she may well have had a hand in designing when the house was built in the 1740s. There exists in the National Gallery of Ireland 'A View of the Bridge and Grotto at Calwich House' by Mrs Delany dated 1756, showing a door in a hillside. It was probably inspired by the fact that Calwich was formerly the site of a medieval priory.

Another eighteenth-century account suggests a feature of the hermitage not at first apparent from the current ruins was a poem inscribed on a large plaque that once stood upon the mantelpiece. During the course of our research we have developed the hypothesis that such a plaque existed and that the poem was copied by Erasmus Darwin.

Charles Darwin recorded that his grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, visited Rousseau at the cave in 1766 and that for some years afterwards they kept up a correspondence.⁴² Although Darwin did not himself record his meeting with Rousseau (or the record does not survive), in a bundle of his poems dedicated to his eldest brother Robert Waring Darwin, the following lines are found under the heading 'Inscribed over the Chimney of an Hermitage':

Silent the Gnomon's shade is thrown,
Slow-circling o'er the letter'd stone;
Successive sands in silence flow,
Shower'd on the mouldering heap below.

Pass, gentle Hours! From morn to night
Pursue with tranquil wing your flight;
Nor Care nor Love with busy hand
Shall shade your sun, or shake your sand!⁴³

The editors of Darwin's poems assume that this poem is by Darwin himself and that the title is a poetic conceit, but there is in fact no reason not to take Darwin at his word. This is just the sort of poem that we might expect to find decorating an eighteenth-century hermitage. None of the other hermitages within the vicinity of Darwin's home at Lichfield, and later Derby, have a chimney – neither Cratcliffe, Kedleston, Dale Abbey, Anchor Church, Ilam, Sneinton nor the hermitage built by Matthew Boulton in the grounds of Soho House in Birmingham. The only exception is the rock-cut dwelling at Rowtor Rocks, near Birchover, in Derbyshire, but there the natural rock overhangs the fireplace.

We turned to the photogrammetry survey in search of evidence to support the existence of a plaque in the alcove above the fireplace. The digital model allowed us to view this part of the ruin with a variety of different lighting arrangements, with either the original colours or a neutral grey surface. Rotating the view, as seen in the video clip,⁴⁴ helped to clarify surface details. A combination of these techniques revealed traces of the plaque that we had not noticed during our initial visit. The outline of the plaque is particularly clear along the top, top-left and top-right edges (figs 20 and 21). A second visit to the ruin confirmed the results of our photogrammetry-based analysis.

In later years, Darwin adapted the hermitage poem into a poem of his own, published posthumously in 1836. He had a habit of incorporating other people's poetry into his own.

42. Darwin 1879 [2002], 47.

43. *Poems of Lichfield and Derby*, no. 10, printed in King-Hele and Harris 2011, 17. The poems were typed out, presumably in the 1870s, by Violetta Harriot Darwin (1826–80), the daughter of Sir Francis Darwin (1786–1859): *ibid.*, 54.

44. <https://vimeo.com/stephenhilyard/rousseau-s-cave-reconstruction-fireplace-plaque>.



Fig 20. Fireplace alcove. *CGI Rendering*: authors.

For example, he incorporated the work of his neighbour Anna Seward into his 'Botanic Garden' without permission or acknowledgement.⁴⁵ Here is Darwin's adaptation:

Time, and its Monitors

By the late Erasmus Darwin
 Now First Published
 Silent the Gnomon's shade is thrown,
 Slow gliding o'er the lettered stone;
 The trickling sands in silence flow,
 Showered on the mould'ring heap below;
 The golden hand, with silent pace,
 Steals round and round th' enameled face;
 Smooth on their gems the axles spin,
 The steady balance beats within.
 So pass, ye hours! – my tranquil day
 Nor speeds your steps nor courts your stay.
 For Love (with all his Gorgon trains

⁴⁵. Thanks to Jo Yates for this information.

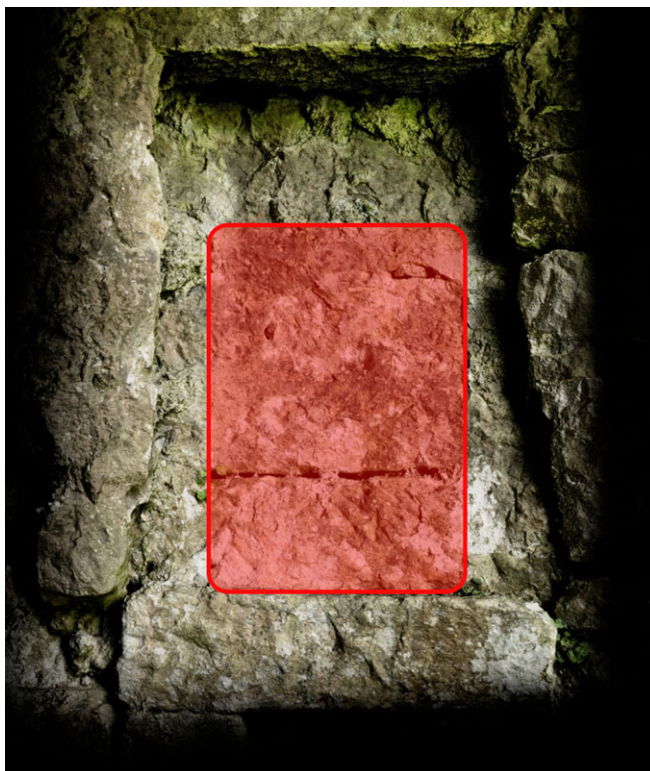


Fig 21. Outline of plaque. *CGI Rendering*: authors.

Of doubts and jealousies and pains)
 Rude Love, my late intrusive guest,
 Has left at length this beating breast,
 And sullen Care's malicious hand
 Nor shakes my sun, nor shakes my sand.⁴⁶

Darwin has here kept the theme of tranquillity but, characteristically, added the theme of love and updated the time-keeping technology – but the original poem is simply a melancholy ode to tranquillity.

The original poem makes it all the more likely that the cave contained probably the most typical *memento mori* decoration of a hermit's cave at this time, an hourglass. It is also worth noting that the 1930 sale catalogue included a sundial 'Top carved G.R. 1762, with Engraved Brass Plate' (fig 22). If this were in close proximity to the hermitage, it would have added meaning to the poem above the fireplace. The poem's references to 'the Gnomon's shade' and 'the mould'ring heap below' suggest that the original source of the poem was a sundial-bearing headstone, and that Davenport copied it as a suitable decoration for his newly-built hermitage.

Unsurprisingly, given his determinedly self-sufficient character, Rousseau himself seems to have happily embraced the role of hermit. He signs off a letter to Granville as follows:

46. Wilson 1836.



Fig 22. Lot 708 a sundial from the 1930 sale catalogue.

Adieu, Monsieur; derechef bon voyage, et souvenez-vous quelquefois *du pauvre hermite*, votre voisin, Rousseau [Adieu, Monsieur; and bon voyage once more, and remember sometimes a poor hermit, your neighbour, Rousseau] (our italics)⁴⁷

The letter is undated but internal evidence suggests a date of 1766.⁴⁸

Ten years after Rousseau's departure, Josiah Wedgwood referred to the hermitage in a letter to his business partner, dated 4 May 1777:

Our neighbour Mr Sneyd of Keel has married one of his daughters to young Mr. Davenport, of Davenport. You knew his father who gave Rousseau a hermitage in Derbyshire [sic].⁴⁹

In summary, the small fireplace, the lack of any water feature or shell decoration and the correspondence of Mary Delany, Josiah Wedgwood and of Rousseau himself all point to

47. Hall 2011, 72–3.

48. It is possible that Rousseau was informed about the hermitage before he arrived in Wootton; for, before he accepted the offer of rooms at Wootton, he enquired of the conditions in which he might live there. His concern was that he should be able to live independently (Edmonds and Eidinow 2006, 150; Zaretsky and Scott 2009, 134).

49. Printed in Farrer 2010, 245.

the cave as having been a small self-contained hermitage. Although it was close to the house, a connecting passageway would have contradicted the eremitical ideal that it promoted. It may, then, be safely assumed that the connecting passage was put in when the terrace was built shortly after the Rev Davenport Bromley inherited the house in 1837. Prior to that date, and the addition of the western wing, the hermitage would have stood in the garden about five or six metres from the house.

We may then envisage a sequence of events wherein the 'not large' house that Rousseau knew was built by Richard Davenport (*c* 1705–70) at some time around 1750.⁵⁰ He acquired the land from Lord Bathurst in 1728.⁵¹ Some nineteenth-century sources mention that Wootton was built to a design by Inigo Jones, but this claim reflects a common confusion between Wootton Hall and Wootton Lodge (a mile away).⁵² It was the latter that was built to a design by Inigo Jones. In the garden of the house, and sharing the same magnificent views as the house,⁵³ Rousseau's Cave was originally a free-standing simple hermitage carved out of and embellishing a natural outcrop of bedrock.

There are other examples of eighteenth-century hermitages carved out of rocks, in Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Devon,⁵⁴ but perhaps inspiration was also drawn from nearby caves made into houses, which can be seen to this day about four miles away at Mayfield near Ashbourne.⁵⁵ The carving out of the sandstone outcrop at Wootton may have been carried out by lead miners from the nearby Weaver Hills.

The hermitage consisted simply of a door, window, fireplace and roof. The alcoves were probably decorated with *memento mori* such as a crucifix and an hourglass. The recess above the fireplace carried a plaque with an anonymous poem praising the cave's tranquillity. Most likely wherever possible, both inside and outside, the bare rock was left undisguised. Perhaps some strands of ivy were left to climb the exterior of the hermitage, so as to emphasise the building's 'natural' simplicity. The eastern wall, of which almost no trace now remains, was probably built up artificially, strong enough to help support the roof but left looking picturesquely unfinished. No doubt there was a table and a free-standing seat of some sort, but little else. The overall intended impression was that this was a building that had grown from nature.

In the original hermitage there was presumably a window in the eastern wall. This may have been quasi-ecclesiastical, like that shown in the contemporary illustration of Merlin's Cave, completed by William Stukeley in 1737. Merlin's Cave, as depicted in this illustration, is the nearest parallel example to Rousseau's Cave that we have found.⁵⁶

However, many of the features of the cave, including the calcite crystals embedded in the walls of the cave (with lime mortar), were intended to be seen at their best at nighttime, by candlelight. We can be confident that the stalactites, the crystals and the tufa all date from the eighteenth century, for this form of decoration had fallen out of fashion by the

50. Cruickshank and Robinson 1999.

51. Wrottesley 1907, ii.

52. The earliest example of this confusion is John Preston Neale's description of Wootton Hall in *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen* (1821). Neale's illustration of Wootton Hall is actually of Wootton Lodge.

53. 'Some ornamental hermitages were hidden in woodlands, but others were constructed, like gazebos, to afford a view for the hermit and his guests': Campbell 2013, 97.

54. *Ibid.*, 126–7, 132, 136.

55. 'The Rock-cut Buildings Project' directed by Edmund Simons is currently investigating rock-cut structures throughout the UK. The highest concentrations are in south Staffordshire, north Worcestershire and southern Shropshire.

56. Stukeley's Merlin's Cave is discussed in Smith 2013.

nineteenth century. And we can be confident that the domed roof was another original feature, for the surviving remnants of the stalactites are attached to the surviving lowest course of the roof.

By 1837, when the Rev Davenport Bromley inherited Wootton Hall, since hermitages and ‘natural’ gardens were no longer in fashion,⁵⁷ a terrace was built that absorbed the hermitage into the enlarged house. At the same time, a passage and a larger window looking onto the cave’s interior were built so that, from the comfort of his home, his guests might still see where Rousseau had worked on his *Confessions*.

Between 1837 and 1842 alterations were also made to the exterior south face of the cave in order that it might fit inside the box of the terrace, in such a way that the facing stones of the terrace would run on in a straight line from the south face of the house. The protruding rock was cut back and the entire surface made roughly smooth prior to the building of the wall of facing stones. This is when the south face became covered with chisel marks from a mason’s point chisel. These were not made during the removal of the facing stones, for there is no indication that the facing wall was tied back to the stone outcrop in any way – there are no marks on the outcrop where metal or masonry ties might have been anchored. In 1837/8 the gap between masonry and stone might have been filled with rubble, possibly with some lime mortar. Dismantling the wall would not have led to the considerable evidence of chiselling that can now be seen on the southern face of the cave’s exterior. Rather, these marks were made during the building of the terrace. At the same time, the cave’s chimney was dismantled and the top of the Main Outcrop, where there are also marks from a mason’s point chisel, was made slightly flatter. Marks from the same tool suggest that the entrance way was also ‘tidied up’ at the same time. (Presumably, the lowest course of the ashlar facing stones were left at Wootton by the Podmores because in 1930 they were still buried by the Victorian terrace.)

Building the terrace over the cave meant that its window no longer admitted any daylight. The solution was to create the roof lantern/skylight at the apex of the domed roof. It is also most likely that the design of the window was altered at this time, for Mr Podmore’s drawing looks slightly more like what would be expected of a date of 1837–42 rather than *c* 1750. Perhaps the new owner considered the original window a little too small, crude and rustic. The window seen by Mr Podmore was relatively large, taking up in length most of the eastern wall, suggesting that it was built not for the purpose of looking out from the hermitage but for the purpose of looking in, as though looking at a diorama.

It is difficult to gauge the Rev Davenport Bromley’s attitude to Rousseau. He may have been somewhat ambivalent. His father, having been educated according to Rousseau’s recommendations, never liked to hear even the name of Rousseau.⁵⁸ His son had few qualms about carrying out ‘improvements’ to Rousseau’s Cave, but on the other hand he was interested enough in Rousseau to have a window built so that his guests might see into the cave without leaving the comfort of the house. Fortunately, Davenport Bromley’s ‘improvements’ for the most part only affected the cave’s exterior. In the Victorian period the fireplace and the alcoves may have been seen as rather crude and rustic, but through some spirit of respect for Rousseau they were left alone. Consequently, even now, the interior of the cave would be recognisable to Rousseau.

57. Campbell 2013, 53.

58. Howitt 1840, 514.

He would also recognise much of the surrounding countryside. The Weaver Hills were a favourite place (see supplementary material for images). Another favourite place was The Twenty Oak Wood. According to a footnote in *The Vales of Wèver: A loco-descriptive poem* by John Gisborne: 'In a field, at a small distance from Northwood, stands a cluster of oaks, commonly called the *Twenty Oaks*. They form a circle, disclosing between their trunks a beautiful prospect. To this silent retreat Rousseau used to retire, during his residence at Wootton, and some of the stones may still be seen which formed his seat.'⁵⁹ Gisborne was living at Wootton Hall when he composed this poem. The seat is gone but the copse, near Northwood Farm and about half a mile south-east of Wootton Hall, still exists (Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference SK 1196 4434). There are currently about fourteen fair-sized to large oak trees, and oak is still the predominant species (see supplementary material for images). Rousseau's love of oak trees is made clear in Book VI of *Confessions*: 'Often I have said, when I have felt less well than usual, "When you see me at the point of death, carry me into the shade of an oak, and I promise you I shall recover".'⁶⁰

As a postscript, it should also be mentioned that there is a second-hand memory of the hermitage preserved in George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859). The story is set in 1799 and is partly inspired by the reminiscences of her father, Robert Evans (1773–1849), who worked at Wootton Hall as a resident agent in the 1790s. It is generally agreed that Donnithorne Hall in the novel is loosely based on Wootton Hall. In the novel, there is a hermitage in the grounds of Donnithorne Hall that plays a most significant role in the story. However, in the novel the hermitage is surrounded by woodland, which suggests that George Eliot may have either confused, or deliberately conflated Rousseau's hermitage with a Victorian 'bungalow Tea-house reached by a rock walk through a wood',⁶¹ which conforms to the book's description of the hermitage. If this was a confusion on her part it is understandable, for when she wrote *Adam Bede* Rousseau's hermitage would no longer have existed in its original form as an autonomous building. Either way, as the scene of a seduction, it makes more sense for the novel's hermitage to be surrounded by trees rather than in the garden of the house.

A SPECULATIVE RECONSTRUCTION

Our speculative reconstruction of Rousseau's Cave (figs 23–27) is based on our detailed site survey as well as the historical research presented above. The window in the eastern wall (fig 25) is based upon the nearest parallel that we have found to Rousseau's Cave, namely Merlin's Cave in Stamford, built by William Stukeley in 1737. As described above, the lower courses of a vaulted stone roof are still present at the site. The masonry is roughly dressed sandstone. From the remaining courses we can deduce that the roof at the western end of the cave took the form of an irregular oval shaped dome. The cave, including the roof, would have been slightly tapered, wider at the east end than the west, as the north and south walls are not parallel. The only area where there is almost no remaining physical evidence is the eastern wall and the presumed window. Here our

59. Gisborne 1797.

60. Rousseau 1782 [2008], 222.

61. 1929 Sale Catalogue, John Rylands Library, Bromley-Davenport Muniments, box 109.



Fig 23. 3D rendering of the hermitage *c* 1766, seen from the north-east. *Image*: authors.



Fig 24. 3D rendering of the hermitage *c* 1766, seen from the south-east. *Image*: authors.



Fig 25. 3D rendering of the hermitage *c* 1766, interior view looking east. *Image*: authors.



Fig 26. 3D rendering of the hermitage *c* 1766, interior view looking west. *Image*: authors.



Fig 27. Reconstruction, c 1750–1837: south elevation. *Image:* authors.

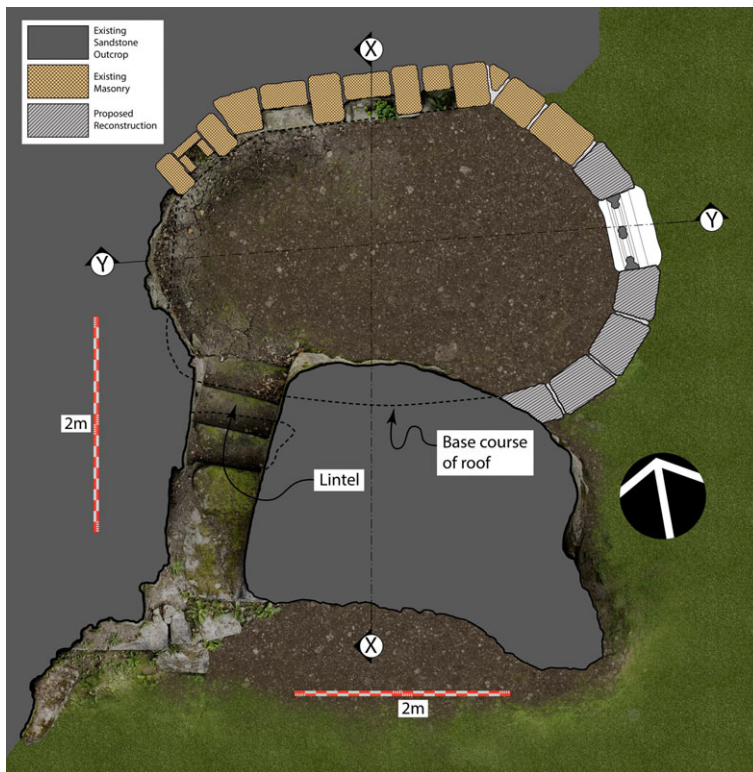


Fig 28. Reconstruction, c 1750–1837: plan at ground level. *Image:* authors.

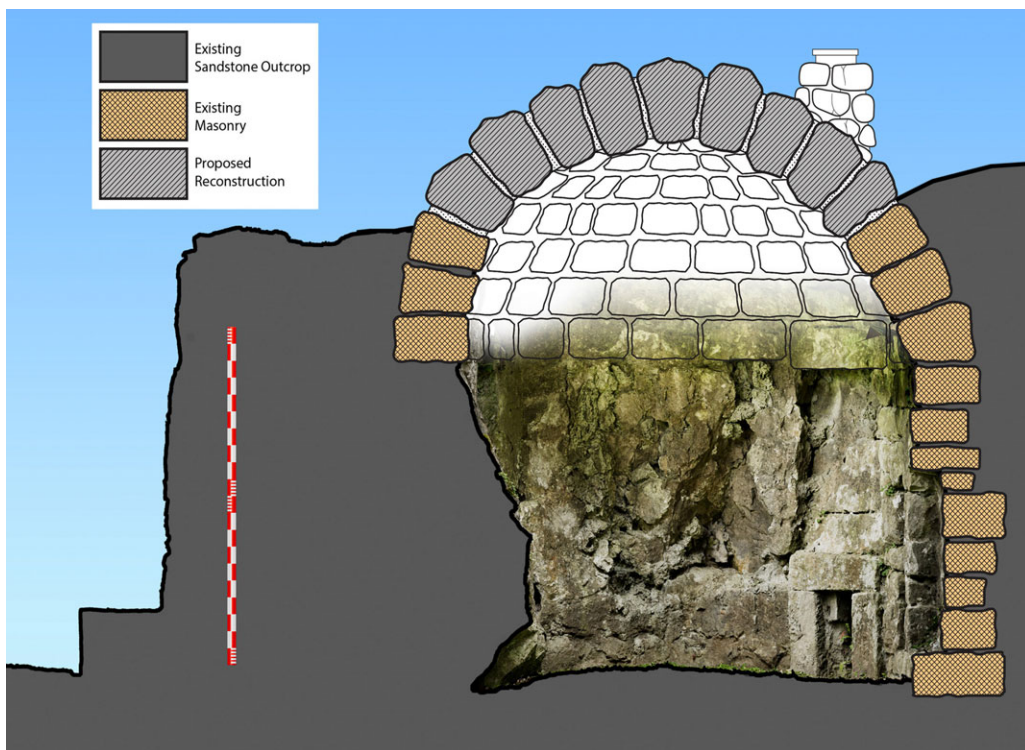


Fig 29. Reconstruction, c 1750–1837: section XX. *Image:* authors.

reconstruction relies upon the nearest available parallels from the history of eighteenth-century decorative hermitages.

The remaining tufa attached to the walls suggests that the alcoves to the right of the fireplace and above it, as well as the recessed area to the left, originally contained small pieces of tufa adhered to the walls with stucco. The tufa may have completely filled these areas, or simply have been placed around the back edges (as are all of the remaining pieces). The stonework around these recesses may have been left natural as a framing device for the tufa ornaments. As described above, small artificial stalactites decorated the lower level of the roof on the south side. They would have composed a kind of ‘natural’ frieze around the lower level of the roof.

For the lines of the inscription above the fireplace, we have fortunately been able to rely upon Erasmus Darwin’s lines, ‘Inscribed over the chimney of an hermitage’.

The 3D digital model generated by the photogrammetry survey of the site was used as the starting point to digitally model our reconstruction. Several views of the model were rendered as well as a fly-through animation giving a sense of the space at the time that Rousseau was using it. This animation was included in the project video.⁶² Still images from this animation are included in the supplementary material. Orthographic drawings of our reconstruction were drawn using orthographic renders of the photogrammetry survey as a starting point (figs 28–30).

62. <https://vimeo.com/stephenhilyard/rousseau-cave-reconstruction>.

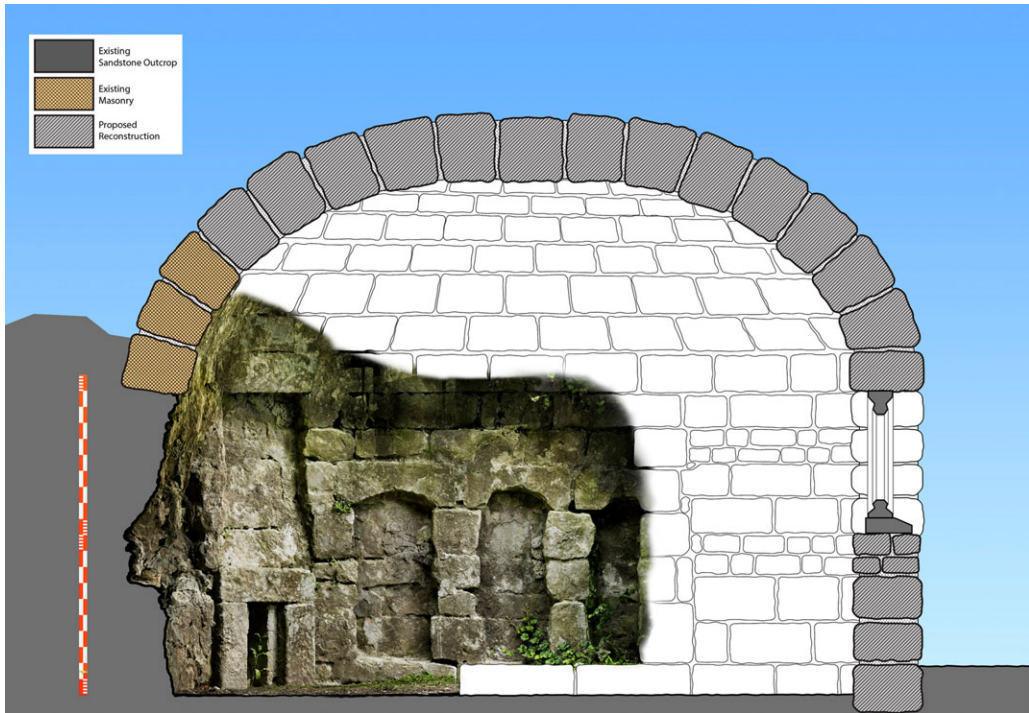


Fig 30. Reconstruction, c 1750–1837: section YY. *Image: authors.*

CONCLUSION

Despite the great interest that Rousseau provoked, no one at the time seems to have thought to describe the cave, except for Mrs Delany, who remarked only that it was ‘rather rude’, and Erasmus Darwin, who recorded only the inscription above the fireplace. Our investigations have confirmed Mrs Delaney’s description of a basic structure: Rousseau’s study was a small, self-contained rock-cut hermitage. In plan, it was a rounded oblong. Its exterior has since then been considerably altered, but its interior, despite the loss of the roof and one wall, remains to this day in a state that Rousseau would immediately recognise.

The simplicity of the hermitage would not have bothered Rousseau. What mattered more than the comfort of the place was the fact that, with the door shut and the shutters closed, the hermitage admitted no daylight. For:

My poor head can never submit itself to facts. It cannot beautify; it must create. It can depict real objects only more or less as they are, reserving its embellishments for the things of the imagination. If I want to describe the spring it must be in winter; if I want to describe a fine landscape I must be within doors; and as I have said a hundred times, if ever I were confined in the Bastille, there I would draw the picture of liberty.⁶³

63. Rousseau 1782 [2008], 166–7.

Thus, it is no coincidence that Rousseau's celebrated descriptions of setting out to seek his fortune – evoking beneficent sun-dappled woodlands and the promise of romance and adventure – were written, in 'the melancholy land where I am now living',⁶⁴ in a self-sufficient hermit's cave, lit mainly by candlelight.⁶⁵

In many ways of course *Confessions*, like all great works of literature, transcends time and place of its creation. Nonetheless, we believe that seeing where much of it was written adds something to its interest. With that in mind, we hope this report will provide the opportunity for others to pay a virtual visit to the cave, both as it exists today and as it existed in 1766.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003581525100292>

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64. Ibid, 132.

65. Rousseau ended his days in similar accommodation at Ermenonville. There, his study was a small cabin surrounded by an English-style garden.

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