

Application Name: ALTON STATION FOOTBRIDGE**Number:** 1437002**Type:** New**Heritage Category:** Listing**Address:**

Alton Railway Station, Station Road, Alton, Hampshire

County	District	District Type	Parish
Hampshire	East Hampshire	District Authority	Alton

Recommendation: Reject**Assessment**

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Historic England has received an application to assess the footbridge crossing the railway line at Alton Station, East Hampshire for listing.

The footbridge, along with the other station buildings, was assessed for listing in 2014 and was found not to meet the criteria. The new application presents the new claims that the bridge is the last surviving built in timber.

The bridge does not stand within a conservation area.

HISTORY AND DETAILS

A railway station was first built to serve the Alton line between Alton and Farnham in 1852. The Alton, Alresford and Winchester Railway company extended the line to Winchester, and in 1865 opened the new line and replaced the original station building. The company was bought in 1884 by the London and South Western Railway (LSWR).

Records show that the installation of a footbridge at the station was recommended in 1891, and that in 1894 it was given a roof, and then glazed in 1896, which, the applicant alleges, was due to complaints from women and claims it represents an early example of the triumph of women's rights. The bridge is a non-standard type and may have been moved from another site, though there is no evidence to confirm this suggestion. It is the last surviving of 26 timber bridges erected by the LSWR between 1890 and 1906.

The footbridge has a U-shaped plan, with stairs running north with a quarter turn to cross the track linking platforms one and two. The bridge has a timber superstructure with iron bracing; it is clad in match-boarding and has fixed casements in timber frames. There is shaped timber eaves detailing and a shallow arched roof in corrugated sheeting. It is match-boarded or sheet-boarded internally, and has timber stairs and banisters.

Timber footbridges were first erected over railway tracks in the 1840s; it was once a common construction material but was superseded by more durable iron in the 1870s. The earliest, and only listed, fully-timber railway footbridge is at Darlington and dates from 1864. There is a timber bridge at Eridge, unlisted, attached to the booking office. Numerous others incorporate substantial timber elements, such as the footbridges at Shrewsbury and Clapham Junction railway stations. By the 1880s almost all were built using iron, with most railway companies developing standard models.

The LSWR was initially somewhat tardy at providing footbridges, their resistance due to the expense of a feature which made no contribution to revenue of the railway. The attraction of timber as a material was likely to have been its economy: about half the cost of an iron footbridge, however, the price that had to be paid for economy was durability. The LSWR examples started to decay in the 1920s and 30s and were replaced by the Southern Railway, using a standardised reinforced concrete design. The LSWR stopped building timber footbridges when it developed a distinctive lightweight steel structure. It also began to experiment with concrete construction for station footbridges, the first going up in 1910.

DISCUSSION

The Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings (DCMS, 2010) states that stringent selection should be applied to buildings which post-date 1840. The Historic England Listing Selection Guide for Transport Structures (April 2011) provides context and specific considerations for the building type, and explains that increasingly rigorous selection should be applied to railway structures post-dating 1860 due to quantity of buildings that survive, and that exemplars of the house-style of a railway company may merit designation. Rarity is a consideration, and for footbridges, engineering interest will be a factor, too. The interest of the individual components of an ensemble of historic railway structures will be conferred additional value as part of that group.

The building material is of limited interest. Iron became an increasingly popular material for the construction of footbridges from the 1870s and so rather than Alton being a rare survival of an earlier, less-sophisticated structure, it is in fact only rare because the railway companies had abandoned the building material in favour of a superior one by the time it was built. It does not embody technical innovation nor is it of particular engineering interest.

The bridge does not exemplify an LSWR 'type' or house style. There are two other LSWR footbridges listed as part of station groups, and a number of other unlisted examples surviving.

The claim that the bridge represents an early example of the triumph of women's rights is unfounded. The piecemeal development of bridges was common on the LSWR with a number of examples receiving a roof and glazing in phases separate to the construction of the bridge.

Judged against the listing criteria and the considerations in our supplementary guidance, the footbridge at Alton Railway Station does not merit listing for the following principal reasons:

- * Lack of architectural interest: a relatively late example of a railway footbridge, conservative in its design and old-fashioned in its construction;
- * Lack of group value: the associated station buildings have been assessed and were not listed, hence the bridge is not part of an ensemble of special interest.

CONCLUSION

The loss of the footbridge would be extremely regrettable, because it has clear local value and interest. However, structures may only be listed where they possess special architectural or historic interest. This is not the case for the Alton footbridge, hence it cannot be recommended.

SOURCES

M Hutson, 'Crossing the Line on the LSWR', *Historical Model Railway Society Journal*, Vol 15 11-12 (1996)

Geoffrey Body, *Railways of the Southern Region*, 1989, 32-33

RA Williams, *The London and South Western Railway*, David and Charles, 1973, Vol II, 81-4

The Historical Society for the London, South Western Railway, 'South Western Circular', Vol 14 (October 2007)

RPS for Historic England, National Heritage Protection Plan 4B3: Transport and Communications
4B3.102: Historic Railway Buildings and Structures: Overview of development pressure and review of
significance, 25 January 2016, available at

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/historic-railway-buildings-and-structures/>