

**Former Cowbridge Intermediate School for Girls: Assessment of Additional Information, March 26<sup>th</sup> 2020**

**Background**

Dr Tudur Davies has written to the Deputy Minister raising a series of points in respect of the assessment of the former Girls School in Cowbridge, and enclosing a letter from the local campaign group, and additional information supplied by Dr Sian Williams. Having carefully considered the points in these three submissions, I have concluded that the information presented does not seriously challenge the basis of our previous assessments.

**Assessment**

I will address each of the points raised in turn:

1. That the building was not assessed against the criteria for listing.

We have carefully considered the case for special architectural and historic interest and addressed both aspects already.

In brief, for post-1840 buildings, the selection criteria point to the necessity to identify the best examples of particular building types, listing only buildings of definite quality and character. We recognise the intermediate school as an important building type, and the benchmark for listing is set by other examples previously cited. At Cowbridge, the original building does not wholly survive, as large-scale additions were made in 1909. We concluded that the building as it survives cannot be described as a good surviving example of a late C19 intermediate school, and that its overall architectural character (as a multi-phase building) has also been seriously compromised, most notably by the insertion of UPVC windows. This may seem like a minor incident, but the impact of refenestration on the architectural interest of buildings is very serious, undermining any claim to definite quality and character. Our assessment acknowledges the retention of some features (including roof structures and staircase), but we have concluded that overall, it is not an especially good or well-preserved exemplar of its type.

As regards historic interest, the case in favour rests on this building being the first intermediate school for girls in Wales. The criterion of historic interest focuses on buildings that illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural or military history. We are in no doubt whatsoever that the Welsh Intermediate Education Act is of seminal importance, and we have listed the best examples of schools built according to its provisions, including an early Girls School (Harold Road Junior School, Abergavenny). I am satisfied that the statutory list already includes buildings that illustrate this important aspect of national cultural/social history (both in respect of education generally, and education for girls more specifically). The ability of this particular building to illustrate that history is compromised by the points addressed in consideration of its architectural merits, principally the fact that it does not survive as built.

2. That the building is historically significant

We have addressed this in our consideration against the criteria; it is the Welsh Intermediate Education Act that is of historical significance, and we have already identified those buildings that best exemplify its provisions. We have also previously addressed the controversy that surrounded its establishment.

3. That the building is a C19 building of note

We have addressed this in our consideration against the criteria: as surviving, the building has a late C19 phase, but was considerably extended in the early years of the C20; although these alterations were carried out in a manner that respected the general style of the original building, they were on a very considerable scale, marking extensive change, particularly in overall form. The building has also been altered since, notably by the replacement of the windows with UPVC.

4. The contribution of the architect of the original building to Welsh culture

I am in no doubt that the architect (Robert Williams) is a highly interesting figure, but I am not persuaded that in itself this provides grounds to list this building, as his original design does not survive intact, and cannot be said to be a clear expression of his ideals. Any case for listing based on historical association is undermined for the same reason: the criteria direct us to consider the extent to which elements of a building's original contemporary character have been retained. As already set out, in this case, the original contemporary character has not been well retained.

## **Conclusion**

Our evaluation necessarily refers back again and again to the architectural merits of the building; the criteria for listing are partly focused on special architectural interest, both in terms of design, decoration and craftsmanship, and also in terms of important examples of particular types; they are also partly focused on special historic interest: the illustration of important aspects of the nation's history. The illustrative capacity of a building is dependent on the quality and integrity of its historic fabric – the better preserved a building is architecturally, the better it is able to illustrate an aspect of history. On all these counts, the fact that the building does not survive as built, and that its final form has also been compromised by alteration, undermines any case for listing against the criteria of architectural interest, historic interest, or historical association.

Judith Alfrey  
26<sup>th</sup> March 2020