

**P-05-949 SAVE COWBRIDGE OLD GIRLS' SCHOOL FROM DEMOLITION,
Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 25.08.21**

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24th August 2021

Dear Members of the Petitions Committee,

RE: Petition P-05-949. Save Cowbridge Old Girls' School from Demolition

By way of an overview, the purpose of our petition and campaign is to seek listed status for the Former Intermediate School for Girls, Cowbridge, Vale of Glamorgan. Our petition was submitted in March 2020 having gained more than 5,500 signatures in just 6 weeks. Signatories were not just based in the Vale of Glamorgan but were from every region of Wales, and indeed, further afield. Our campaign is supported by substantive evidence and expert opinion, including some of the most prominent academics and heritage professionals across Britain. The campaign is also backed by the Victorian Society and SAVE Britain's Heritage, with the school being listed in the Victorian Society's 'Top 10 Endangered Buildings' in September 2019.

Why is the building important?

Built in 1895 it was the first school specifically built for the intermediate education of girls following the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889, which in itself was a pivotal moment in Welsh history. The school was also unusual in that it provided accommodation for boarders to allow less privileged girls to be able to attend the school from further afield. It also was very rare due to the inclusion of a specifically built science laboratory, pioneering women in STEM.

The building itself is very attractive with many unique architectural features. It was designed by Robert Williams, an architect who was an early proponent of the Welsh School of Architecture and seen as a pioneer of his time. He was also a proponent of the Welsh language in building literature and later worked for the Davies Bryan family (of Aberystwyth University) in Egypt where he was central to the Welsh community. As a result of the information revealed through our campaign Robert Williams is now included in the Dictionary of Welsh Bibliography, confirming his importance within Wales and further afield.

These are just some of the many reasons why we are campaigning to ensure that this building is protected for years to come so that it can continue to stand proud as an attractive reminder of a pivotal moment in Welsh history (specifically women's education) and the work of a prominent Welsh architect.

Why is the building at risk?

The site is currently sold 'subject to planning' to a developer who seeks to demolish the school following an application submitted to the Vale of Glamorgan Planning Department in December 2018 (please note the application is yet to be determined). Whilst the community welcomes development of the site and the provision of additional affordable housing in the town, the potential loss of the school has been met with dismay. The school building makes a positive contribution to the architectural and historic interest of Cowbridge and has been a prominent and important part of the town for over 100 years. Despite efforts to work with the developer and alternative conversion plans being presented by SAVE Britain's Heritage, the developer still seeks to demolish the school.

A listing request was made to Cadw following the presentation of a substantive report documenting robust evidence to support listing. However, this request was declined based on subjective opinion rather than objective assessment. Cadw appointed an independent consultant to review and support their decision, however, significant conflicts of interest have been raised about the appointment and whether it could be considered truly independent. Due to this an independent peer review of the listing decision was requested but was also subsequently declined. Furthermore, a Freedom of Information request has demonstrated that Cadw have purposefully withheld information and refused to engage in academic debate on the significance of the school.

Established procedures exist with Historic England and Historic Scotland to peer review decisions where there are contrasting opinions. In this instance we have extreme differences in opinion between Cadw (and a consultant employed by Cadw) and more than 20 highly regarded experts in the fields of history, architecture, heritage and archaeology. Within this group are the President of the Royal Historical Society, Director of the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, former members of Cadw's Historic Building Council, a former President of the British Academy and several Founding Fellows of the Learned Society of Wales. Given their collective expertise and experience, their views should be respectfully taken into consideration and Cadw's decision scrutinised. Their letter to the previous Deputy Minister was overlooked and their evidence-based opinions ignored ([22.03.20 Correspondence - Petitioner to Committee Additional information - Group letter of support .pdf \(senedd.wales\)](#)).

As a number of assessments are still required prior to the planning application being considered by the Local Authority, it will be sometime before it will be brought forward to the Planning Committee. Whilst it is appreciated that the Petitions Committee may wish to leave the future of the school in the hands of the Local Authority, the national significance of this building makes it a wider issue, requiring action by the Welsh Government. Furthermore, should the application be refused it still leaves this national historic asset at risk of future applications for demolition. **We ask that you consider putting the petition forward for a detailed inquiry to scrutinise all of the evidence provided in this case and press for an independent peer review through the established channels so that we can ensure that this important part of Welsh history is not lost.**

Yours sincerely,



Sara Pedersen

SAVE Cowbridge Girls' School Campaign Group