

**P-05-949 SAVE COWBRIDGE OLD GIRLS' SCHOOL FROM DEMOLITION,
Correspondence- Petitioner to Committee, Additional information, 22.03.20**

Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas AM
Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

18th March 2020

Dear Lord Elis-Thomas,

Old Girls School, Aberthin Road, Cowbridge, Vale of Glamorgan

We, the undersigned, write to demonstrate our objection to the decision not to list the former intermediate School for Girls on Aberthin Road, Cowbridge which we consider to be of high architectural and historical importance on a national level. The school is currently under threat of demolition as part of a proposed housing development on the site.

Concerned local residents have sought our support for the case to list the building by Cadw. With all due respect to Cadw, we find their rationale for rejecting to list the building to be lacking in this case, given the surviving architectural attributes of the building, the significance of the building in relation to the history of Welsh education, the history of equality in women's education and the output of Robert Williams, the school's architect, a figure of outstanding importance, hitherto rather in the shadows.

The Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889 was a specifically Welsh experiment, where, for the first time in British history, intermediate education was to be offered to all children, regardless of their economic status or ability. The Welsh Intermediate Education Act pre-dated similar legislation in England by 12 years, which is a fact about which Wales should be proud. The schools built in response to the act were an educational experiment of national importance, putting Wales at the forefront. Cowbridge has the accolade of being the first purpose built Intermediate Girls' School in Wales, constructed in 1895-6 and skilfully extended in 1909.

Some 95 Intermediate schools were built in Wales. Of these, only five are listed, that at Pontypridd now sadly derelict. The intact nature of the Cowbridge School - externally and internally - compares very favourably with the listed schools. Typically, many schools were modernised across Wales, but Cowbridge retains many splendid features including the original staircase, open timbered roofs, doors, partitions, fireplaces etc.

It is a national tragedy that Cadw refuses to list the building, their decision based on ignoring it during the resurvey of Cowbridge in 1999, at a time when our understanding of Victorian buildings and their architects in Wales was somewhat lower than at present. We contest Cadw's conclusion that the school has been too heavily altered to retain its original character, given the sympathetic manner in which it was extended in 1909. Cadw's claim that the school has lost its character following the replacement of some of its original windows with UPVC is also perplexing, given that this has not altered the main fabric of the building and that there are numerous examples of buildings listed in Wales without their original fenestration.

Of the 95 Intermediate Schools to be built, Cowbridge is highly original in its style, the nods towards Scots Baronial and the striking array of chimneys of special note. The construction of local limestone (eschewing the typical brick trim) reveals the ideals of the original architect, Robert Williams, a renowned radical, prominent (and rather early) advocate of building conservation, a national pioneer in terms of social housing (in Wales and England), archaeologist and early promoter of the Welsh School of Architecture (and in tandem, a noted critic of contemporary building design and practice in South Wales). He was also a proponent of the Welsh language in building literature, and designed some prominent buildings in South Wales. He has emerged from the shadows as an important and highly influential figure and a talented designer. His practice extended to London, and later, Egypt. He is one of a very few Welsh 'exports' in terms of architects and was at the very centre of national debate on social issues including welfare, architectural design and conservation. Robert Williams has also been recognised by the Dictionary of Welsh Biography as providing a significant contribution to Welsh culture.

In terms of local politics, so strong was the opposition of Cowbridge grammar school to adopting the county scheme, that this resulted in Glamorgan being the last county to adopt the provisions of the 1889 Act. This controversy propitiated the foundation of the new girls' school, aided by a local benefactor.

In short, the school stands as testimony to the remarkably early provision of free school education in Wales and is a pioneer in being the first girls' Intermediate School to be completed within the country. In terms of education for girls, the school at Cowbridge is a very important aspect of Welsh history, surely resonating strongly with the aspirations of the Welsh Government with regards to gender equality. Put simply, it is a monument of Welsh history to be proud of.

We ask the heritage minister to reconsider the listing of the old girls school in Cowbridge and undertake an independent peer review of the decision not to list the building. To allow the demolition of a building of such demonstrable architectural and historical importance would be a national disgrace and would run counter to the spirit of a devolved Wales, as so well enshrined within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Yours sincerely

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