

Matthew Coward

PEER REVIEW: GROVE PARK SCHOOL, ACTON, WREXHAM

I have been asked to look at this case, with particular regard to the robustness with which you have applied the criteria, the adequacy of the process, and to consider whether there is any recent research in England, which might inform this case. I have also been asked to compare this school against listed schools in England of a similar date. I have not been asked to review the list-worthiness of the building.

This note only deals with the issues raised above, and is separate from any consideration as to the desirability of retaining this handsome and no doubt locally significant building. This is the third occasion on which we have been asked to comment on Cadw's handling of a designation case, and we are happy to assist.

1 Application of the Criteria

The Welsh criteria are set out in Circular 61/96 and have each been applied in the listing reassessment of 15 March 2016 under the headings of "Historic Interest" and "Architectural Interest"; the other factors to be considered, "close historical associations" and "group value" are not relevant in this case. The assessment shows clear evidence of close study of the building in question, and in my opinion correctly characterises the context. Regarding the point about the provision of air raid protection being a claim to special note, it needs to be remembered that factories and public buildings increasingly included air raid shelters from the passing of the 1937 Air Raid Precaution Act. In my view the criteria have been applied correctly.

2 Adequacy of the Process

The case was inspected extremely rapidly after the submission of the listing request. This took place less than ten years since the building was last considered for listing, which shows a willingness on Cadw's part to reconsider, even though no new evidence was initially submitted. The report of 15 March is clear and considered in setting out the context for the case: my only comment is that it would have helped to have identified comparable schools of this period which have been listed, so as to show where the bar for listing has been set. In my view the process has been fully followed.

3 Research on Schools in England

I am not aware of any recent work on this subject that could have a material difference on the assessment of this case. Our recent (2010) book *Schools, History, architecture, adaptation* by Elain Harwood (available digitally at <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/englands-schools/englands-schools.pdf/>). As the Cadw assessment makes clear, this was a busy time for school-building nationally, but schools such as Grove Park School

adhered to a well-established formula which makes assessment of such buildings relatively straightforward. There is no reason not to think that the right framework of understanding was present in reaching this decision.

4 Comparable Listed Schools in England

There are 663 entries on the National Heritage List for England, when one searches for listed 20th century schools in England. Some are older buildings now in use as schools; others are older foundations with later additions. Of the wholly 20th century listed examples, these vary considerably, from the traditional to the cutting edge: innovation in planning and design have long been key considerations in selecting schools for listing. This means that the traditional Neo-Georgian designs such as Grove Park School are often rejected for listing. There are listed schools of this kind: and they can be of clear distinction. Examples of relevance might include the Newland School for Girls, Hull (1912 – NHLE no 1208622); Walthamstow High School for Girls, London Borough of Waltham Forest (1913 – NHLE no 1065612); the John Roan Upper School, London Borough of Greenwich (1926-28– NHLE no 1393296); and the High Storrs School, Sheffield (1932 – NHLE no 1255132 and illustrated in Harwood p.64). Each possesses an architectural quality that is readily sensed. I do not believe that any of these listing decisions strengthen the case for the listing of Grove Park School.

I hope this is helpful.

Dr Roger Bowdler
Director of Listing, Historic England

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