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# touchstone

ARCHITECTURE IN WALES REVIEW PROSPECT DIR

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Architecture

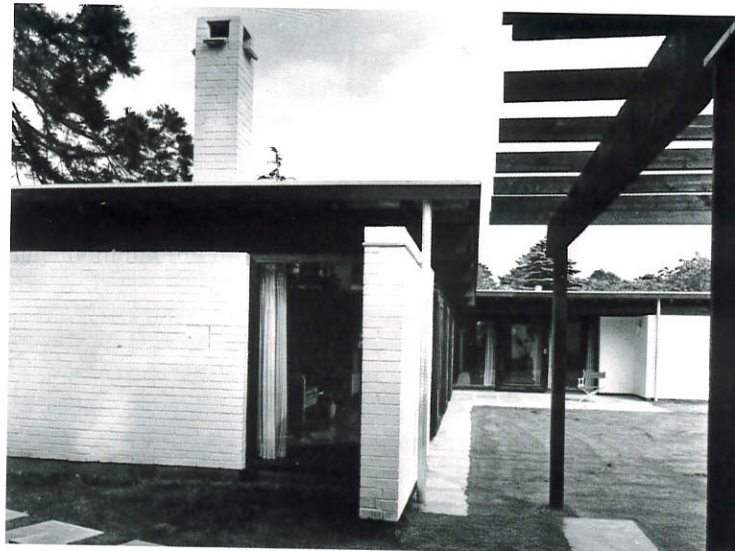


# going backwards forwards

Does the lackadaisical listing of significant post-war architecture in Wales suggest there is a deeper cultural resistance to progressive and innovative architecture in our country? Based on his substantial research, **Jonathan Vining** sets out the evidence.



*Talar Wen*, the earliest private house by Dewi-Prys Thomas, was completed in 1953. Designed for his sister Rhiannon and brother-in-law Gwynfor Evans, who later became the first Plaid Cymru MP, it is a compelling amalgam of modernism and vernacular influences. It is the only one-off house in Wales created by a fundamentally important architectural figure in Wales, and built for someone since described 'the greatest patriot of 20th-century Wales'<sup>1</sup> – and yet it is not listed. Two of Thomas's later houses in the north-west of England – *Entwood* in Birkenhead and *Cedarwood* in Liverpool – have been listed, the latter at grade II\*. Why is this? Is it because his later work was better? Surely not...



All photos by Jonathan Vining unless otherwise stated.

Above:

*Talar Wen*, Llangadog by Dewi-Prys Thomas, 1953. Important for Wales, culturally and architecturally, but curiously unlisted, despite the listing of two houses by the same architect in England. Is Cadw's judgement sound? (Photo: Monica Cherry)

Right:

*The Gore*, Llandaf, 1966: the most significant of Graham Brooks's domestic architectural oeuvre. An Eisteddfod Gold medal winner, but again unlisted. (Photo courtesy of Graham Brooks)

*The Gore* in Llandaf, Cardiff is the most significant of Graham Brooks's individual houses. Richard Weston, internationally-renowned architectural critic, argues that its spatial design is grounded in a language that can be traced back via the Californian 'Case Study' houses of the 1950s and Wright's Usonian houses, to that architecture of flowing space crystallized in Mies van der Rohe's Brick Country House project of 1924.<sup>2</sup> It won the Gold Medal for Architecture at the National Eisteddfod for Wales in 1969, but it's not listed either. Why not?



*Hafan Elan* is a group of twenty-four single-storey houses for older people completed by Bowen Dann Davies Partnership in 1980. The project exemplifies 'Romantic Pragmatism'. It won a RIBA Commendation in 1982 and the Gold Medal for Architecture at the National Eisteddfod the same year, among other awards, and, guess what? It isn't listed.

Each of these projects is a significant work of architecture in its own right, as well as being the most important example of three particular themes of post-war domestic architecture in Wales. So, do they suggest a fundamental inadequacy in the listing of our post-war architectural heritage? Does Cadw have a problem with post-war architecture in Wales and why is it leaving at risk a whole body of unrecognized assets that are open to potential demolition or unacceptable alteration? Is there a legal and policy context difference in Wales that would help to explain it? It would seem not.

### Playing by the rules

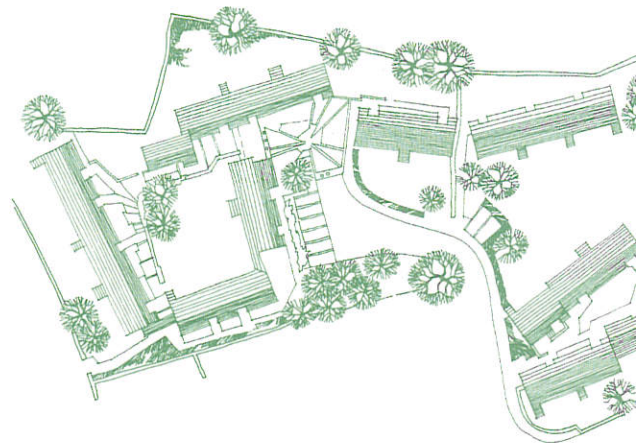
At the time of writing, the principal conservation legislation (applying in both Wales and England) is the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*, and national planning policy guidance relating to listed buildings is contained principally in *Planning Policy Wales*. The Welsh Government has a 'duty to compile lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest' and Cadw, the Welsh Government's historic environment service, has the 'responsibility for protecting, conserving and promoting an appreciation of the historic environment of Wales'.<sup>3</sup> One of Cadw's specific functions is to give advice to the Welsh Government's responsible minister on buildings to be listed and *Welsh Office Circular 61/96* provides the criteria applicable for '... deciding which buildings to include in the statutory lists:

- architectural interest: the lists are meant to include all buildings which are of importance to the nation for the interest of their architectural design, decoration and craftsmanship; also important examples of particular building types and techniques (eg. buildings displaying technological innovation or virtuosity) and significant plan forms;
- historic interest: this includes buildings which illustrate important aspects of the nation's social, economic, cultural or military history;
- close historical associations with people or events of importance to Wales;
- group value, especially where buildings contribute an important architectural or historic unity or are fine examples of planning (e.g. squares, terraces or model villages).<sup>4</sup>

So, don't the houses and developments of Dewi-Prys Thomas, Graham Brooks and Bowen Dann Davies Partnership meet any of these criteria? Or is it that Cadw is nervous in its judgement of the more recent past, concerned that it may get it wrong?

The circular goes on to say that ...

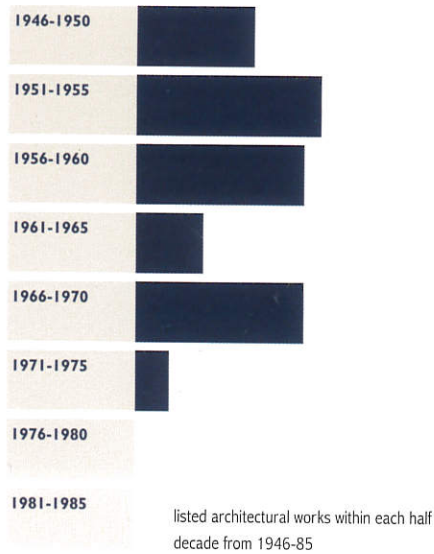
'Buildings which are less than 30 years old are normally listed only if they are of exceptional quality and under threat. The approach adopted for twentieth century listing is to identify key examples for each of a range of building types – industrial, educational, hospitals, etc – and to treat these examples as broadly defining a standard against which to judge proposals for additions to the lists.'<sup>5</sup> Surely, the works of those three distinguished Welsh architectural practices and practitioners fall under that definition?



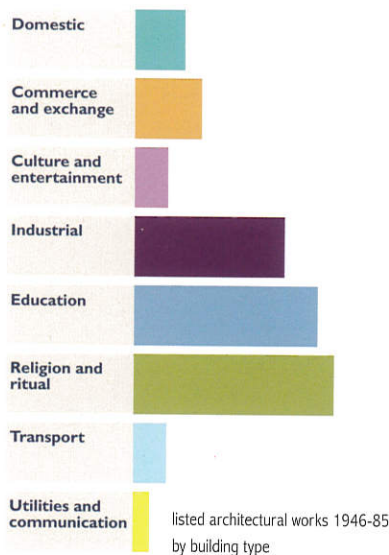
Above:

*Hafan Elan*, Llanrug by the Bowen Dann Davies Partnership, 1980, a practice that produced a slew of awards winning projects led by the skilful pen of Bill Davies; but yet again not listed. (photos courtesy Bill Davies)





Parke-Davis & Company research and manufacturing centre, Pontypool by the Percy Thomas Partnership, 1969-71. One of a whole group of outstanding industrial buildings in Wales that are unlisted. (Photo Jonathan Vining)



### Missing from the listing

Currently, there are a total of about 30,000 listed building records for Wales, of which only 71 relate to buildings completed since the second world war.<sup>6</sup> However, many of these entries pertain to minor structures such as walls, gates, sculptures and memorials rather than to individual works of architecture. Analysing the remaining 44 discrete works of actual architecture since 1946 is revealing and worrying ...

The histogram [left] shows the number of listed architectural works within each half decade from 1946 to 1985 (the end date is taken, as this equates to the thirty year rule established in *Wales Office Circular 61/96*). There are relatively few listed buildings from the first halves of the 1960s and the 1970s and only two buildings completed since 1971 have been listed. Both were reactive cases. First, the gallery and administration block at St Fagans National History Museum (Percy Thomas Partnership, 1974), in response to a current expansion project, and second, a private house near Wrexham (J B Davies, 1973) because of the perceived risk associated with an impending change of ownership. The subsequent time up to 1985 has been completely neglected, which is puzzling. Does Cadw have a blind spot for this period?

If one studies the post-war schedule of listing by building types, other curious omissions are apparent [bottom left]. *Industrial buildings*, *education*, and *religion and ritual* asset types dominate. Maybe that can be expected? However, all of the industrial buildings and most of the education buildings are from the period 1946-60, reflecting the reconstruction of the immediate post-war years (although this period itself is not without some significant omissions). Yet again examples from the later years are poorly represented. With regard to industrial buildings, for example, significant omissions from the list for the period 1971-85 include: the award-winning Parke-Davis research and manufacturing centre, Pontypool (Percy Thomas Partnership, 1969-71, now disused and falling into disrepair; the Amersham Radiochemical Centre, Cardiff (Percy Thomas Partnership, 1974-81); and Richard Rogers and Partners' Inmos microelectronics factory, Newport (1980-82). Since the demolition of the heroic Brynmawr Rubber Factory, Inmos is one of the most, if not the most, important post-war industrial buildings in Wales.

Roman Catholic churches dominate the *religion and ritual* type, although the ones at Benllech (S Powell Bowen, project architect Bowen Dann Davies 1967) and Rhuddlan (Bowen Dann Davies Partnership, 1975-76) stand out for designation also, and there are examples too of places of worship of other denominations that merit consideration. The two major examples of post-war crematoriums in Wales – at Coychurch (Fry Drew and Partners, 1969-70) and Llwydcoed (HMR Burgess + Partners, 1969-70) – are listed but the third highly-regarded one at Margam (F D Williamson & Associates, 1968) – recently published in the *Twentieth Century Society* <sup>7</sup> – as yet, is not.

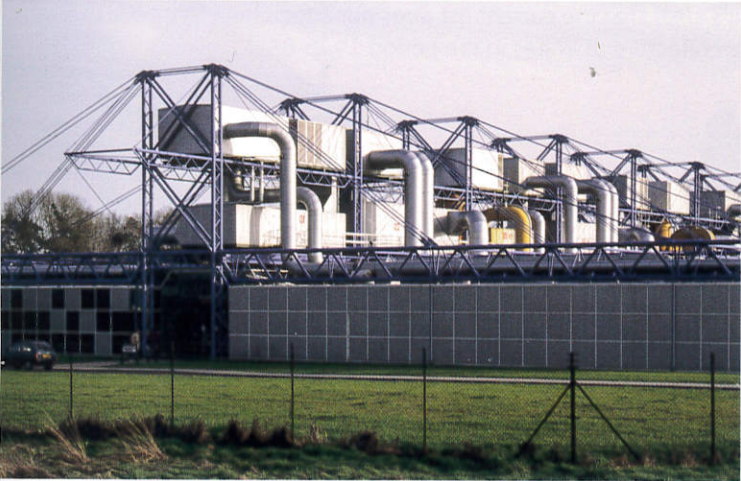
facing page:

- 1 Amersham International Radiochemical Centre, 1974-81, by Percy Thomas Partnership. (Photo A)
- 2 Astonishingly this is unlisted also. The Inmos micro-electronics factory, Newport, by Richard Rogers and Partners, 1980-82. (Photo JV)
- 3 The most important post-war industrial building in Wales, and now gone for ever. The Brynmawr Rubber Factory, by the Architects Co-operative Partnership, 1945-51.
- 4 'Religion and ritual' architectural types fare no better, such as the unlisted Roman Catholic Church of St Illtyd, Rhuddlan by Bowen Dann Davies Partnership, 1975-76. (Photo courtesy Bill Davies)
- 5 Llwydcoed Crematorium by HMR Burgess & Partners, 1969-70 is listed. (Photo JV)
- 6 Mid Glamorgan Crematorium, Coychurch Fry Drew and Partners, 1969-70, is listed. (Photo JV)
- 7 But Margam Crematorium by F D Williamson & Associates, 1968, published by 20th Century Society is not listed. (Photo JV)
- 8 Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Benllech, 1967, by S Powell Bonn, is worthy of designation. (Photo JV)





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### The big black hole

The most striking deficiency, however, is in the dearth of domestic projects that are designated, with only two individual houses (one of these an idiosyncratic holiday house in St David's by James Gowan, 1967, and the house near Wrexham mentioned earlier) and the well known group at Little Orchard, Dinas Powys (T G Jones and J R Evans, 1968-73) currently listed for the period 1946-85. This is an astonishing oversight given the rich series of themes in post-war domestic architecture in Wales. These range across a trajectory of modernist idioms and bear comparison with contemporaneous examples elsewhere in the UK, produced by architects engaged in the same wider currents and discourse.

Apart from the three domestic projects referred to earlier (and others of their ilk), examples need to be considered particularly from public housing schemes in the ten years following the second world war (eg those in north Wales by S Colwyn Foulkes and the Gaer-Stelvio neighbourhood, Newport (Johnson Blackett, borough architect, c1946-49)) and later from the two new towns that were developed in Wales at Newtown and Cwmbran.

Interestingly, there are some asset types for which there are no key examples at all, including health and welfare which, ironically, is one of the building types actually noted in the clause in *Welsh Office Circular 61/96* relating to twentieth-century listing. From other building types, there are some major works of architecture in Wales that are not yet listed, including: Plas Menai (National Outdoor Pursuits Centre), near Caernarfon (Bowen Dann Davies Partnership, 1982) 'arguably, the most admired and influential building completed in Wales in the last quarter of a century' and regarded by many 'as the most persuasive built manifesto of the search for a Welsh architecture'<sup>8</sup> and Pencadlys Gwynedd, Caernarfon (Merfyn H Roberts county architect, and Dewi-Prys Thomas, consultant to Wyn Thomas Partners, 1984), published in *Touchstone* issue two, May 1997. Overall it's clear that the current list does not adequately recognize the architecture of Wales in the period 1946-85.



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4

1 One of the lucky few domestic listings of the period 1946-85, Little Orchard, Dinas Powys, by T G Jones and J R Evans, 1968 and 1973.

2 Gaer-Stelvio housing, Newport by Johnson Blackett borough architect, 1946-51, one of many public housing projects worthy of listed designation as is .....

3 Cae Bricks, Beaumaris (S Colwyn Foulkes, 1950 (Photo IV))

4 Also unlisted, various phases of housing at Trehafren, Newtown by Gordon Redfern and J L Russell





left:  
 Arguably the most admired and influential building completed in Wales in the last quarter of a century, Plas Menai, Llanfairisgaer, by Bowen Dann Davydd Partnership, 1982, lies unlisted.  
 (Photo courtesy Bill Davies)

below:  
 21 Pencadlys Gwynedd, Caernarfon 1982-4, Mererid Roberts county architect with Dewi-Prys Thomas. A major work surely worthy of listing. (Photo JV)



**Contrast and compare**

*Welsh Office Circular 61/96* says that buildings can be added to the list by geographical or building-type surveys. Cadw, from its establishment in 1984, prioritized a geographical resurvey of the country, which it carried out diligently by 2005, supplementing with ad hoc spot listings. But, is it not surprising that – given the specific requirement to identify key examples of twentieth-century building types – no building-type thematic studies have been carried out? Surely, such a methodology would be essential to be able to judge effectively which were the key examples to be listed?

Perhaps one of the difficulties with the listing of later twentieth-century buildings in Wales is that the perception of the value of modern architecture is not widespread. Maybe it is thought that a greater degree of justification is needed to define the significance to the nation than a building of an earlier period? If so, this would suggest that there is a need to promote our post-war heritage, but little has been done in Wales in this regard either. The appreciation and recognition of post-war architecture in Wales as a heritage resource appears to be mediocre at best.

Compare this with England, for example, where since 1987 the research programme of English Heritage (now Historic England) has included the preparation of a suite of guidance documents to explain its approach to designation, comprising forty-four selection guides covering the full range of heritage asset types. Twenty of these relate to building types with information and examples from the post-war period included as an integral part of each document – and there is one guide that deals specifically with twentieth-century domestic architecture in England. The result of this strategic approach is that about 150 post-war domestic projects alone have already been listed.<sup>9</sup> These include not only bespoke, individual houses, but also twelve or so housing estates and about twenty-five multi-storey schemes – including ones that could be characterized as high-rise or megastructures. And in terms of other building types, the UK Government announced in January 2015, after a rigorous study by English Heritage, the listing of 14 post-war commercial office buildings in England built mostly between 1964 and 1984<sup>10</sup> – and this strategic approach towards designating post-war architecture in England continues ... Where is Wales's equivalent?



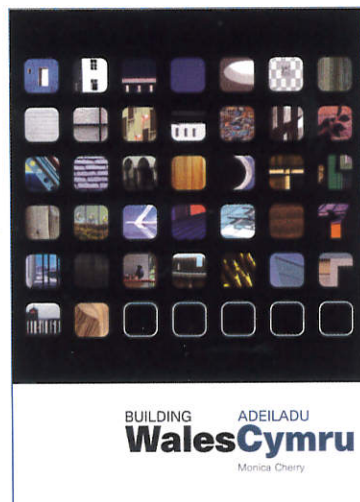


In 2012, Historic Scotland brought out a series of booklets celebrating the work of architects who worked extensively in Scotland, mainly in the post-war period, focusing on their influences and major buildings. English Heritage has collaborated with RIBA Publishing and the Twentieth Century Society to produce from 2009-12 a series of books on twentieth century architects, most of whom had not been published before in that form. And books on post-war architecture in England are prevalent: within the last year two magisterial tomes have been published: *England's post-war listed buildings* <sup>11</sup> and *Space, hope and brutalism: English architecture 1945-1975* <sup>12</sup>.

### Winds of change

Such support for championing a wider recognition of post-war heritage assets has been lacking in Wales. Still the only dedicated published survey in Wales is Monica Cherry's slim volume *Building Wales / Adeiladu Cymru* <sup>13</sup> which illustrates the thirty-five 'most outstanding and representative' post-war buildings in Wales, a few of which are listed with some already demolished. But perhaps the situation is beginning to change?

A monograph of the north Wales architect David Lea by Ada Voelcker has just been published (see page 34-41). Throughout Touchstone has looked back at some of the best post-war architecture and buildings, but it's to be very much welcomed that the RSAW has entered recently into an agreement with the University of Wales to publish a series of ten books on the *Architecture of Wales*. The first of these, by John B Hilling, on the history and architecture of Cardiff civic centre, was published last month. Others in the series will undoubtedly document the work of significant individual architects, p





left:

BBC Broadcasting House, Llandaf, Cardiff, by Sir Percy Thomas and Son, 1963-66. Despite Cadw's recommended listing, it is still to fall under the demolition hammer.

Photo courtesy Capita Percy Thomas.

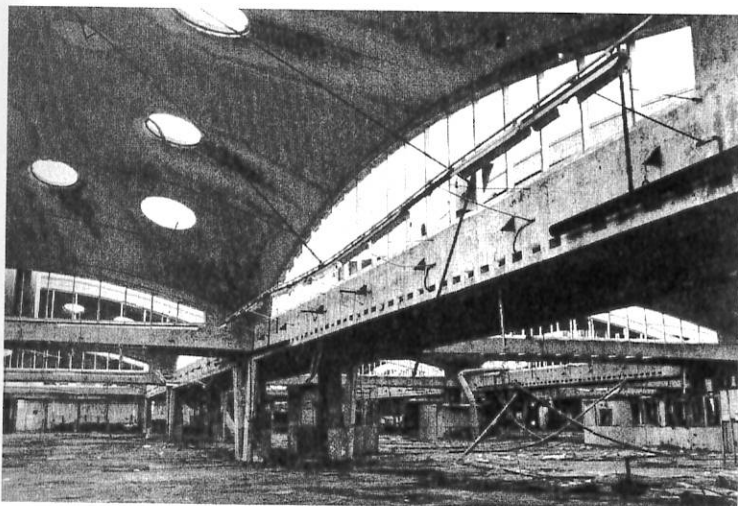
below:

Brynmawr Rubber factory, even though it was listed grade II\*, was wantonly demolished in 2001

right:

Newport Comprehensive School, Bettws, Newport by Evans & Shalev 1969-72.

Photo courtesy RIBA collections



building types and distinctive places in Wales. Hopefully, this series will at least partially fill the void of published material on post-war architecture in Wales. We certainly need this initiative to help build a shared understanding of the value of our post-war heritage that would support moving it into the mainstream of heritage protection in Wales.

Over the last fifteen years we have lost a number of significant modern buildings: the Brynmawr Rubber Factory was wantonly destroyed in 2001 in favour of a speculative housing scheme by a volume house builder (even though it was listed grade II\*); Evans & Shalev's internationally-recognized Newport Comprehensive School at Bettws, Newport (1972) was demolished in 2008; and it's inevitable now that BBC Broadcasting House in Llandaf, Cardiff (Sir Percy Thomas and Son, 1966) will be lost (even though Cadw recommended it for listing). Other buildings of merit have been severely compromised by unsympathetic change because they were not afforded the extra layer of protection that designation would give. I am sure that Cadw recognizes the importance of the post-war period as much as any other, but a concerted effort is needed now to identify the best of the recent past to prevent any more unfortunate losses to our post-war cultural heritage.

- 1 DAVIES, John, JENKINS, Nigel, BAINES, Menna and LYNCH, Peredur I (editors). *The Welsh Architectural Encyclopaedia of Wales*. University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2008, p270.
- 2 Weston, Richard. 'The extraordinary ordinariness'. In: ROYAL SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTS IN WALES, *Touchstone*, issue thirteen, November 2003, p5.
- 3 WELSH GOVERNMENT. *Planning Policy Wales*. Edition 8. Welsh Government, Cardiff, January 2008, p100.
- 4 WELSH OFFICE. Circular 61/96. *Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas*. Welsh Office, Cardiff, 5 December 1996, p36. The forthcoming Historic Environment (Wales) Bill, which was 'agreed' by the National Assembly for Wales on 9 February 2016, will be accompanied when enacted by a new Technical Advice Note 24: Historic Environment in Annex B of which it is intended that the wording relating to the criteria for including buildings in the statutory list will be the same as in the circular.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 KELLY, Rhodri, Historic Environment, Welsh Government (Rhodri.Kelly@Wales.GSI.Gov.UK). Email to Jonathan Vining on 30 June 2014.
- 7 GRAINGER, Hilary. 'Passing Places'. In: *C20*, the magazine of the Twentieth Century Society, 2014, pp38-41.
- 8 WESTON, Richard. 'Revisiting our roots'. In: ROYAL SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTS IN WALES, *Touchstone*, issue 10, spring 2002, p17-18.
- 9 HARWOOD, Elain and DAVIES, James O. *England's Post-War Listed Buildings*. Batsford, London, 2005, p10-11.
- 10 MARRS, Colin. 'Fourteen post-war offices listed'. In: *The Architects' Journal*, 30 January 2010, pp10-11.
- 11 HARWOOD, Elain and DAVIES, James O. Op cit.
- 12 HARWOOD, Elain. *Space, hope and brutalism: English architecture 1945-1975*. Yale University Press, in association with Historic England, 2015.
- 13 CHERRY, Monica. *Building Wales / Adeiladu Cymru*. 2005, ISBN 1-899895-07-8.