***Collaborative Photographic Practice (M5X01635)*-Catrin Morris**

The title of this module was *'Collaborative Photographic Practice'*. To begin this project, we chose our preferred video proposal from the previous project. The aim of this module was to produce an exhibition as a group. My preferred video proposal idea was titled 'Prince of Wales Road', this video proposed we produced work inspired or based on the tragic collapse of three houses in 1950 that killed seven residents. We had one of the smaller groups for this module, only containing three other people. I chose this video proposal as my favourite as my work is consistently linked to some aspect of Welsh history, however I found this project particularly more interesting as I knew very little about the event, therefore had to be very hands on with my researching therefore I could be fluent when discussing the subject.

We begun this project by googling the street and date, very little could be found from a reliable source, as there were online blogs with what was known forst hand, but not many pieces specifically about the disaster, there was one article,  and a link to a few pages from a book.

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**The tragedy that left seven dead when a row of houses collapsed**

A modest memorial appeared on a city street recently, which marked a Welsh tragedy from 1950

SHARE 834 SHARES By Nino Williams 06:00, 27 DEC 2018 UPDATED 08:51, 7 JAN 2019 NEWS

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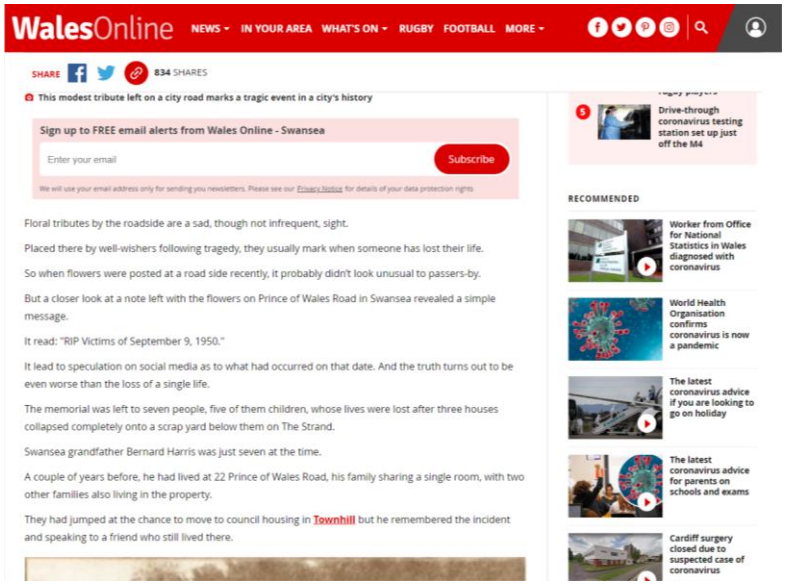

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This modest tribute left on a city road marks a tragic event in a city's history

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Floral tributes by the roadside are a sad, though not infrequent, sight.

Placed there by well-wishers following tragedy, they usually mark when someone has lost their life.

So when flowers were posted at a road side recently, it probably didn't look unusual to passers-by.

But a closer look at a note left with the flowers on Prince of Wales Road in Swansea revealed a simple message.

It read: "RIP Victims of September 9, 1950."

It lead to speculation on social media as to what had occurred on that date. And the truth turns out to be even worse than the loss of a single life.

The memorial was left to seven people, five of them children, whose lives were lost after three houses collapsed completely onto a scrap yard below them on The Strand.

Swansea grandfather Bernard Harris was just seven at the time.

A couple of years before, he had lived at 22 Prince of Wales Road, his family sharing a single room, with two other families also living in the property.

They had jumped at the chance to move to council housing in Townhill but he remembered the incident and speaking to a friend who still lived there.

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The collapsed houses on Prince of Wales Road in September 1950 (Image: SWW Media)

"The street was sometimes known as Jew's Row, as there were a lot of Jewish people living there," Mr Harris said.

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"And there were stables underneath the houses. I had a friend, called Ronnie Lee, who lived on Mill Street right by Prince of Wales Road.

"His father was a docker and he had just gone out and pulled the door shut when he heard a rumbling and then a crash.

"He looked over and saw a guy he knew going under. The man died, although his wife survived and lived for many years."

The background to the tragedy lay in the poor state of the housing stock. And that August had experienced particularly heavy rainfall, with the volume of water compromising the buildings.

Number 24 was occupied by Boer War veteran Samuel Belkin. The 74-year-old died in the incident, although his wife survived, as did their two lodgers.

Their three children, Desmond, aged eight, Marlene, aged six, and Roger, aged three, all perished.

At number 25 next door, 35-year-old Cyril Lewis was killed, along with two of his children; Marilyn, aged eight, and Billy, aged five.

Number 26 also collapsed, but the Thomas family that lived there survived.

The houses had been erected in 1890 on a massive retaining wall that dropped down to The Strand, and there had been serious subsidence issues there years before, when the retaining wall had collapsed onto three cottages on Flint Row on The Strand.

The 1950 collapse was believed to have been caused by the failure of an arch supporting number 25.

Five adjacent houses were immediately evacuated following the disaster, as cracks grew and walls appeared to shift.

coronavirus abuse

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The reason why coronavirus has been so bad in Italy

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A child's body is recovered from the wreckage (Image: SWW Media)

A coroner subsequently exonerated the owners of the properties of any blame, although it was noted there was a slope of as much as eight inches between the back and the front of the properties.

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Verdicts of accidental death were recorded, with the comment of "there is no-one to blame and no company or individual you can reprimand".

A former Swansea bookshop has been transformed into a new bar and coffee shop

The Evening Post, meanwhile, reported that the "doomed Swansea street was sinking for 59 years".

The following year, owners were given six months to make them safe. They were finally demolished some years later.

Mr Harris said: "People were standing in the street, totally shocked. They couldn't believe what had happened.

"It was a real tragedy."

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Prince of Wales Road in Swansea as it is today (Image: Google)

It was a tragedy, that almost 70 years on, hasn't been forgotten, despite the absence of any plaque or notice commemorating the incident.

The identity of whoever left the note and flowers, however, remains a mystery.

These are screenshots of the article we found. This article was written after someone who was aware of the tragedy had left a little laminated note cable tied to the metal fence at where the road now comes to an end. The article itself is presenting the little-known information that is available on the internet. This note is also how Katy (who proposed to make work on this tragedy) found out that this disaster took place.

Castle Street, 1941. (By kind permission of SWW Media)

## Prince of Wales Road

August 1950 had been extremely wet. The newspaper for 21 August proclaimed 'Worst Downpour in Swansea for Years.' There were problems all over the town, with flooded cellars on Sketty Road and Eversley Road. The road collapsed at the junction of Western Street and Beach Street in the Sandfields. There was a 'Pembrokeshire day of prayer' for the harvest lost in the 'wettest August within memory.'

But it was Swansea's decaying housing stock which would show the most awful consequences early in the morning of Saturday 9 September 1950.

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The integrity of a row of terrace houses on Prince of Wales Road in Dyfatty had been fatally compromised by the heavy rain and three houses collapsed into a scrap yard below them on the Strand, 'leaving a yawning gap.' Seven people were killed, including five children.

In No. 24 Samuel Belkin, a seventy-four year-old Boer War veteran, travelling draper and 'one of the oldest members of the Swansea Hebrew community' was killed. His wife Sarah survived as did their lodgers, Charles and Myfanwy Morgan – but their three children Desmond (eight years old) Marlene (six years old) and Roger (three years old) were all crushed to death. Next door at No. 25, Cyril Lewis aged thirty-five was killed, together with two of his children, eight-year-old Marilyn and Billy who was five. His wife Phyllis was described as 'Swansea's most tragic figure'. She escaped with another daughter Christine and baby Alun. She was interviewed lying on the settee at a friend's house in Vernon Street, trying to come to terms with the enormity of what had happened, worrying about Marilyn' s gym shoes.

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No. 25 Prince of Wales Road, September 1950. (By kind permission of SWW Media)

No. 26 also collapsed in a cloud of rubble and dust – but the Thomas family survived.

Memories were suddenly brought to life again with the fear that the 'rumbling roar' indicated that a plane had crashed into houses.

There was a huge rescue operation. The Women's Voluntary Service was described as having gone back into their wartime role. Indeed everyone said it was like a return to the Blitz, with rescuers searching for survivors, carefully removing 'Stick by stick, stone by stone.' It was destruction without warning, without compassion. 'Chairs, mattresses, clothing and domestic utensils were thrown aside by the rescue workers.'

Copyrighted material

Dr Shibko arrived at 6.15 a.m.

> We doctors are not emotional as a rule but it shook me badly. It was reminiscent of the very worst days of the blitz – to see a hand sticking out of the ruins and to feel the pulse to see if there was any life there.

Five adjacent houses were immediately evacuated as cracks grew and walls seemed to shift. The houses had been erected in 1890 on the massive retaining wall that dropped down to The Strand. There had been problems before with serious subsidence in March 1914 when, following 'three earth movements,' the retaining wall had collapsed on to three cottages in Flint Row on The Strand. The place was unstable and insecure.

The 1950 collapse was believed to be caused by the failure of an arch supporting No. 25. No one should have been living there. Now everyone was fearful. 'I can't bring myself to go to bed', said Mrs Rastatte.

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A child's body is recovered from the wreckage. (By kind permission of SWW Media)

> I have slept two nights in a chair in the passageway near the front door, which I leave wide open all night. My baby is in her pram near me and if I hear any sound I will then stand a chance to pull my baby out on to the pavement.

She was evacuated the following day, just before two more houses collapsed on 11 September. Her meagre furnishings

Copyrighted material

were hastily lined up on the street awaiting relocation. On 23 September parts of three other properties collapsed.

The houses were owned by five separate people including the Kramsky sisters of Bishopston and the Coroner was anxious to exonerate them from any blame. We however might wish to reflect on the collecting of rent on properties where there was a slope of as much as 8 inches between the front and back of the houses. The headline in the *Evening Post* on 4 October 1950 reporting on the coroner's inquest was 'Doomed Swansea Street was sinking for 59 years.' Verdicts of accidental death were returned with the comment 'There is no one to blame and no company or individual you can reprimand.'

In May 1951 the owners were given six months to 'execute such work as to make the properties ... free from danger' by the Swansea Stipendiary. A surveyor reported that No. 31 was now leaning 6 inches towards The Strand and the floors were falling almost 11 inches from front to back. Children continued playing amongst the derelict properties. It was some time before they were finally demolished.

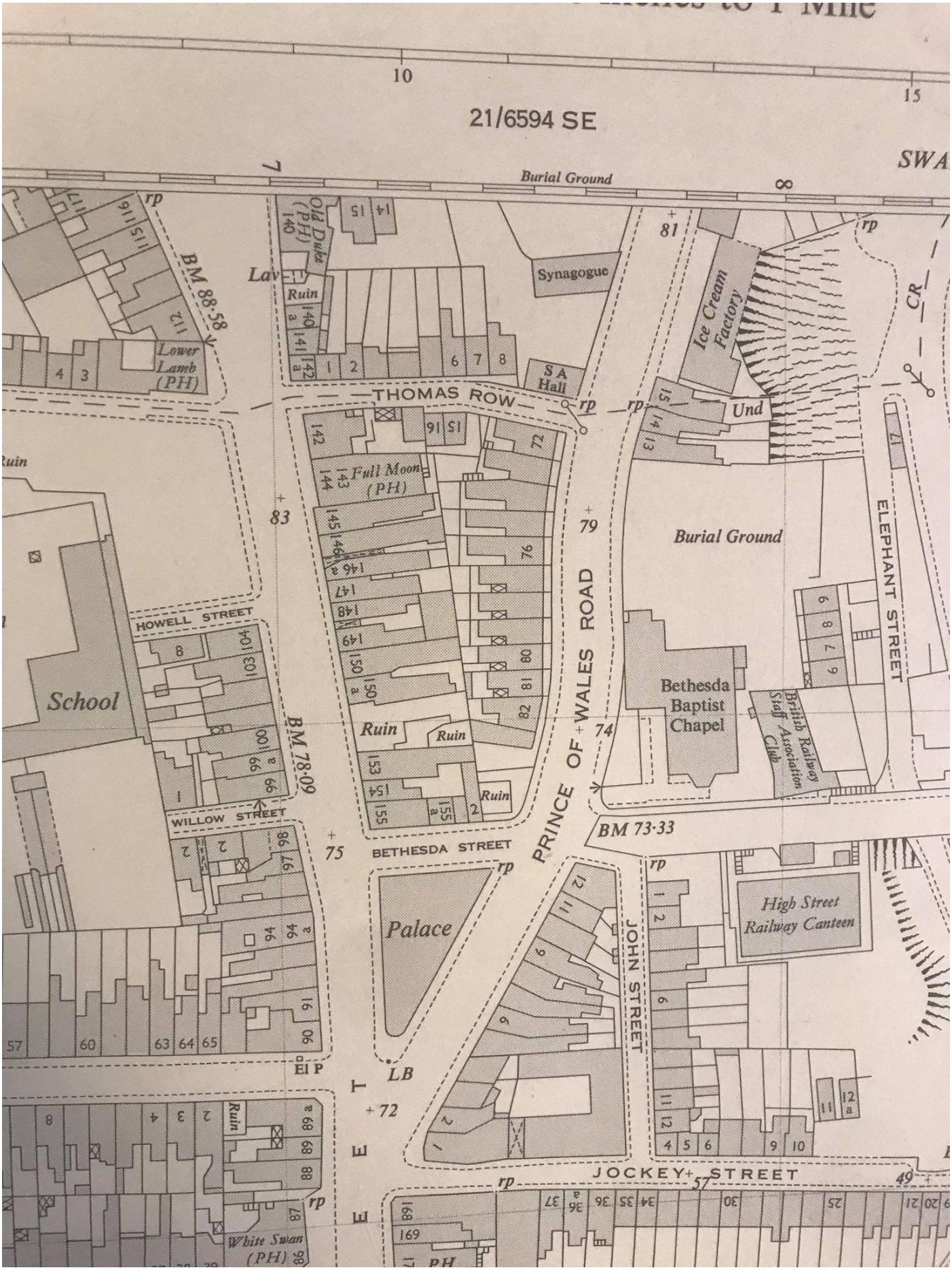
## Moving On

Reconstruction was not an easy process. In 1951 people realised that bomb sites previously used for parking were disappearing and so there were traffic problems as a result of kerbside parking, especially in Wind Street and High Street. Temporary parking places were made available for the

Copyrighted material

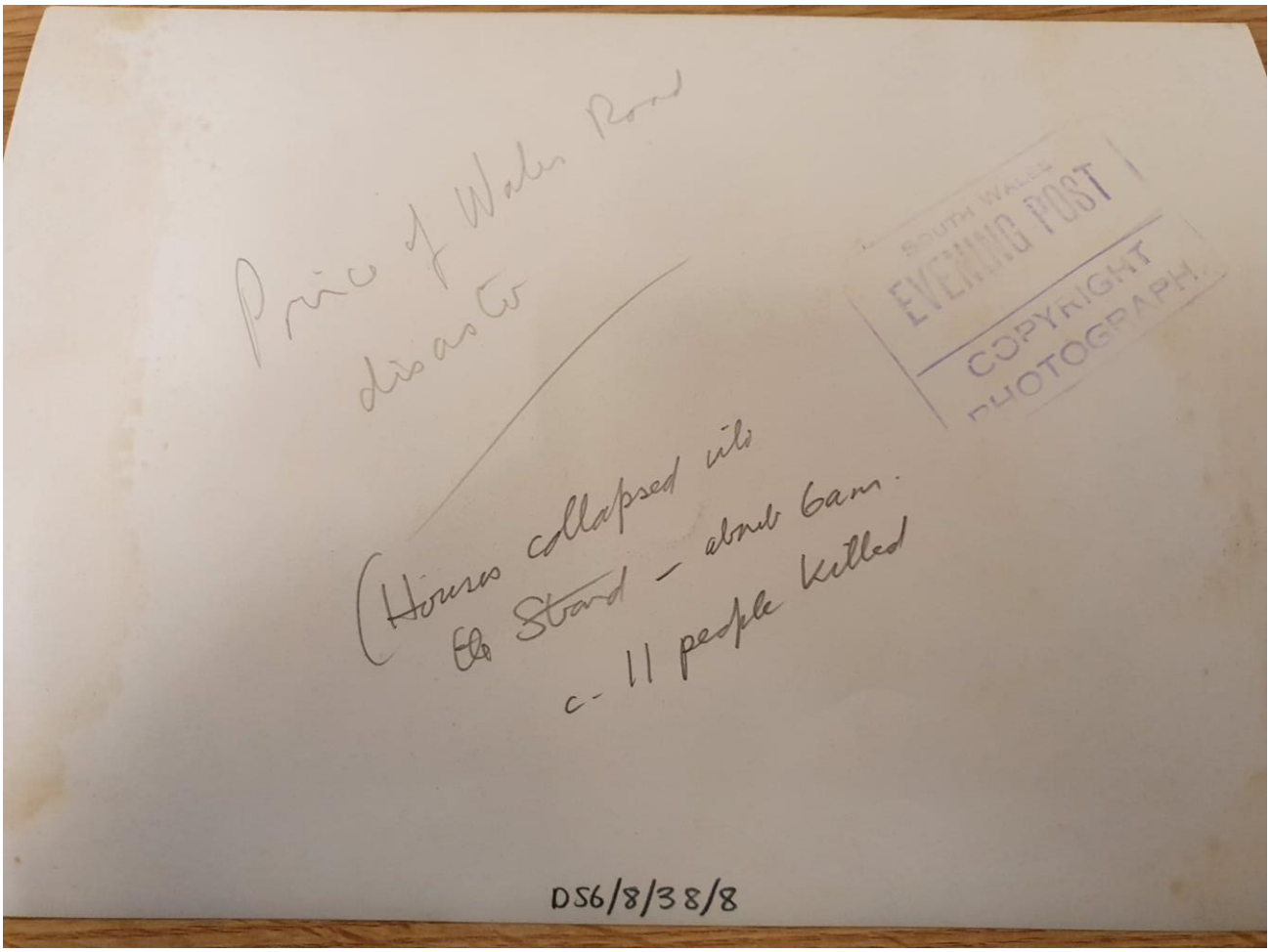
These six pages belong to a book called '*Swansea in the 1950s: Ten Years That Changed a City'* by Geoff Brookes. These pages don't discuss the tragedy in great depth; however, it does outline what happened, and who was affected. There's a snippet of information on how one of the residents who lost a large portion of her family in the disaster, and how she struggled to maintain a normal life after her loss. The book also proceeds to tell us how more houses collapsed in the coming few weeks, however no one else perished, therefore the date 9th of September 1950 was our focus point.

Although we had retrieved some information form the internet, we thought it was very strange how there wasn't much information on the internet about the tragedy, therefore we visited the West Glamorgan Archives. We also struggled to find much useful/new information on our first visit. However, we did look at many old maps of the street. The maps we were given to view struck us as odd as there was one book that contained all the location maps from 1950. Most of the maps were sketchy looking, quite discoloured, and the information written was clearly handwritten, however one map in this book seemed to be digital, as was comprised of crisp lines and very noticeable digital font. This map was the only map in the book that showed Prince of Wales Road.




During the same visit we found a single photograph of the disaster. This photo was a part of someone's personal collection, and was bundled with many other photos from various locations around Swansea.

We were very fortunate that the staff at the Archives were extremely kind, although this photo still had copyright on it, they said that we were allowed to take an image of it for research purposes, as long as we weren't to use it in our exhibited work.



This is a photo of the back of the image. On the back there's personal notes made by the owner of the bundle of photographs, as well as the Archive reference code and copyright stamp. The written information reads *'Prince of Wales Road Disaster (Houses collapsed into the Strand-about 6am. C- 11 people killed)'*. We learnt during our online research that seven people died, however according to the note the photographer made on the back of the photo eleven people in fact perished in this tragedy. We enquired whilst at the archives about why this discrepancy may be, we were told that seven of the house residents were killed, and there were workers that were employed at the site below where the houses collapsed into living on site, and the four unknown people may have been employees of the site, although they could not be sure due to the poor documentation of the event.

During this visit to the archives, David (employee) informed us that he was an acquaintance of a former resident of the street called Ian Smith, and that he worked in the Waterfront Museum and would like to meet us and help in any way he could. We arranged a meeting with Ian and went as a group to talk to him. This visit was quite important to our project as Ian was very helpful in identifying what was true about the story as we knew it, he filled in the gaps, and gave us additional facts. Ian initially confirmed to us that the map we found that was allegedly of the street as it was in 1950 was wrong. The street cut off too soon and showed that the length of the road was too modern. He informed us that the remains of the houses weren't demolished until around 1970, and that there was never in fact an ice cream factory anywhere in the vicinity of the road. Therefore, this map was completely inaccurate. We assumed that the discrepancy with the map was because the effects of the war were still raging through Swansea, therefore the map was most likely lost, and replaced with the modern map. Ian also informed us that the houses weren't only built onto unstable ground that they were slowly sliding onto The Strand, but whomever owned these houses knew this, and continued to build them, although they had placed wooden stilts under the houses as support. These stilts surprisingly helped keep the houses upright for 59 years, despite the first cracks forming within the houses in 1890 the same year as they were built.

Ian kindly provided us with these images. These are some of his family's personal images from the time they lived on the street. He kindly has let us use them as a part of our exhibition in order to give context, however we assured him we would ensure that anything further done to the images we would credit him.

OXO

Up until this point of the project we had thought about the disaster quite objectively, houses fell, and people died. However, after talking to Ian it struck me that this event truly shook the community. We now had images that bought a personal aspect to the project, although people may not know who the people in these images are, they would know they were taken on the street. These images personally were when I started putting faces to the story, these were the members of the community that suffered such a horrific loss. Ian also drew us up a rough sketch of what the street should have looked like on the map. Although the sketch was quite poor, he explained that the map we found in the archives should have shown much further along the road than it did.

15 Prince of Wales
63

No 63 resident (Britain from the Air) website

Ian Smith

the houses were built on wooden stilts over the drop - unsafe.

Happened at 6AM

The backs of the houses fell into the strand.

The fronts of the houses didn't fall - were left for years.

Brick buildings - mostly 3 stories

New houses were built in the 70s

* old maps - national library of Scotland - website.

These are the rough notes I took whilst we met with Ian.

Once we had met with Ian and gathered our thoughts we decided to go back to the archives and try again with a different approach. I suggested we try and find demolition records from 1970 when Ian told us the remains of 'Jews Row' was torn down, along with most of Prince of Wales Road, I assumed records would have been more important and documented by this time. By searching 'Prince of Wales road 1970' all we managed to find was this following image (copyrighted).

Following a suggestion made by one of the Archive staff, we started searching more obscure categories documentation of the road could be under. Therefore, we searched 'Swansea 1970' we found much more, however, we realised that the photos of the work being done on the Strand and on Prince of Wales road were categorised under 'rebuilding Swansea after the war'. The following images were all taken on two rolls of 120 film, these were documentation photos showing what Prince of Wales road looked like before being demolished.

FOR SALE
WATKINS
Cadbury's
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TEL.3750

FOR SALE
WATKINS
Cadbury's

FOR SALE
WATKIN
Cadbury's

EE

WASTE

WASTE MA

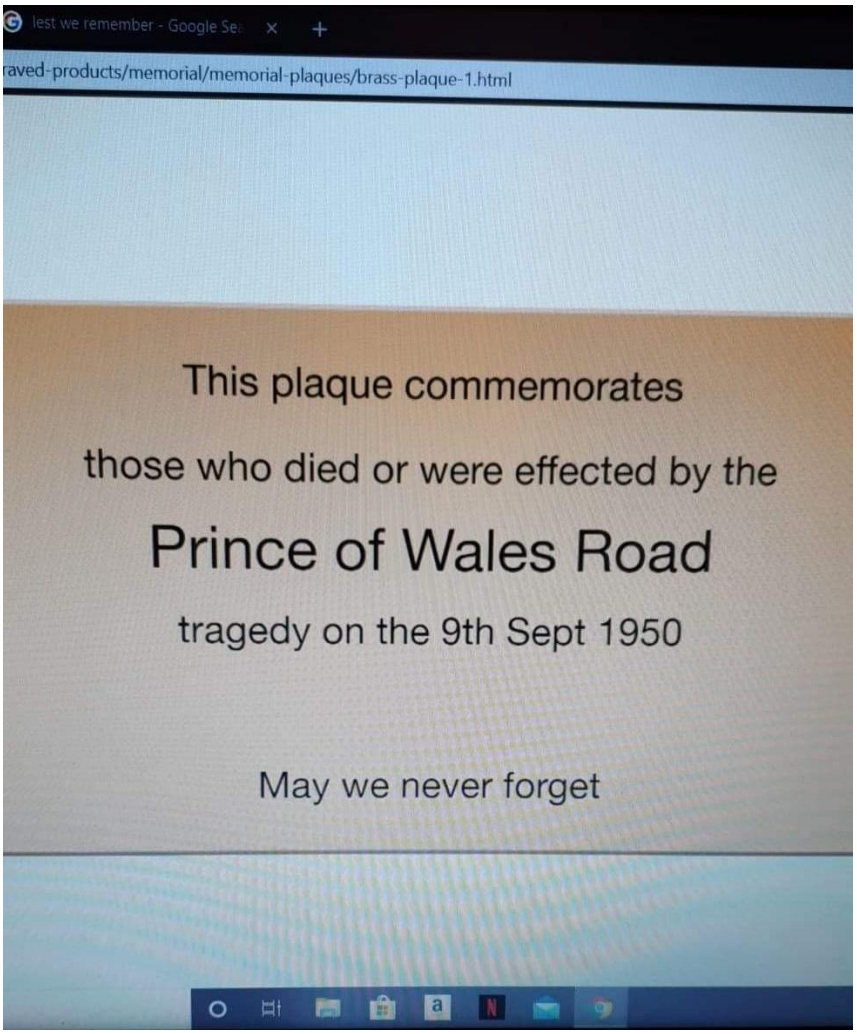
Shot Drinking.
It's the taste that makes you do it.
Twenty golden Sovereigns
for 35 pence.

WASTE MA

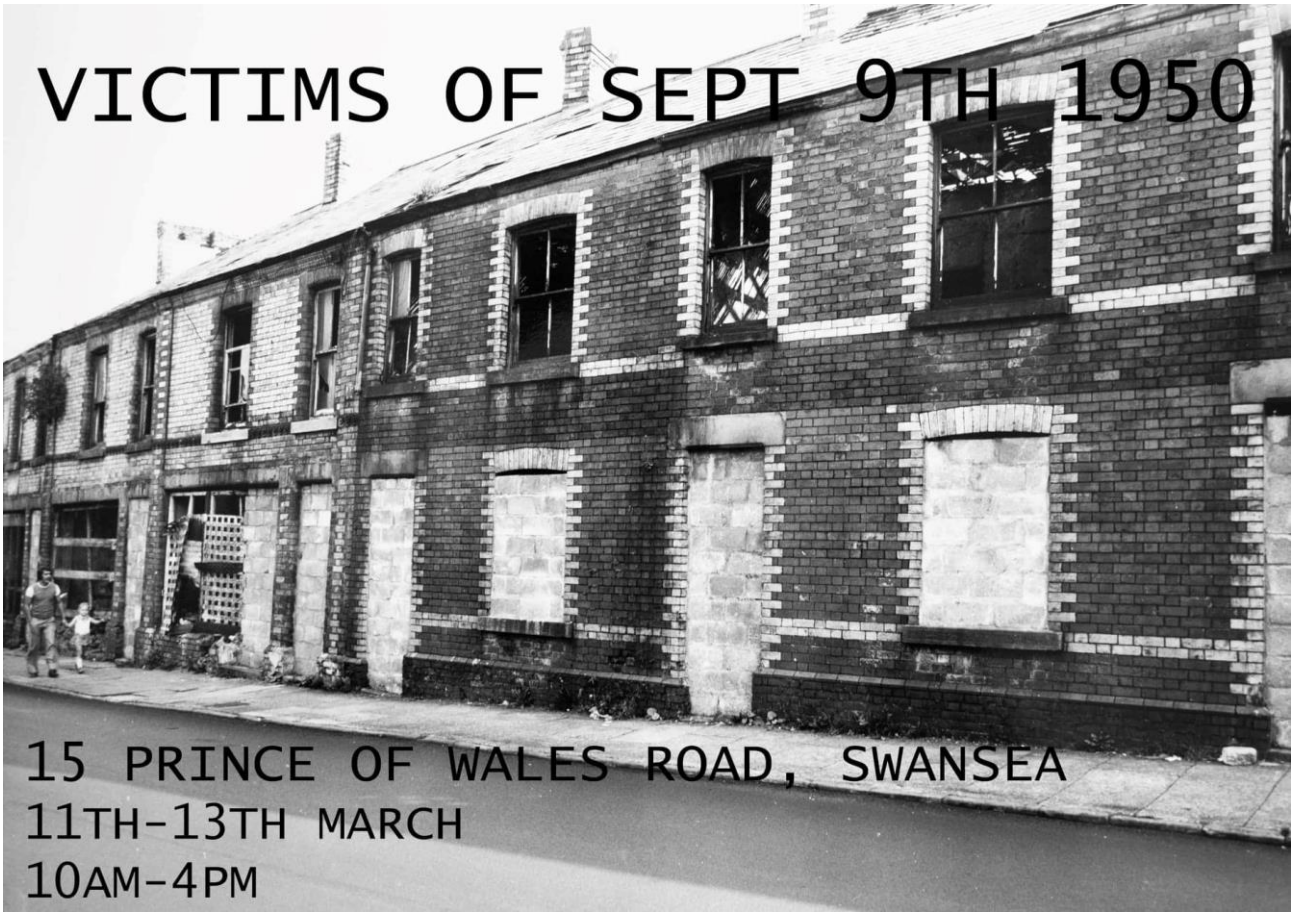
Shot Drinking.
It's the taste that makes you do it.
Twenty golden Sovereigns
for 35 pence.

Although these photos were taken twenty years after the disaster, without that information it would be almost too easy to assume that these photos weren't in fact from the disaster itself. It seems that the street became some sort of time capsule in the twenty years following the disaster.

I had initially wanted to use these photos, printed them large scale, and exhibit outside. However, we decided as a group that we would like the interior of 15 Prince of Wales road to be transformed into some sort of time capsule, we almost wanted to mimic what an abandoned house would look like, therefore I decided against exhibiting these outside because we also weren't sure who owned the land next to the house. Quite early on into the module we had decided that our exhibition would be a platform to bring awareness to the disaster, to remind Swansea of what they had lost, but I suggested that we use our exhibition in order to give some sort of permanent tribute to those affected. I suggested putting up a plaque in the location where the 2018 note was attached, in order to pay our respects instead of taking advantage of this story for a mark. I wanted to put the plaque back where the original note was attached as I believed that our project would come full circle, we would intend you end the walk around the exhibition where our inspiration started. I also insisted that we would have to put our research in one place, if it were just submitting it to a website, as we had such a hard time finding anything due to it being scattered all over different years in the archives. I designed the plaque and got it made.




Whilst waiting for my plaque to be made and delivered I volunteered to create posters and leaflets. We decided as a group that we wanted our posters to be very minimalist, we didn't want to give too much away, as we wanted our exhibition to be informative.




This is our more visually appealing poster, it has very little information, but the photo itself is very striking.

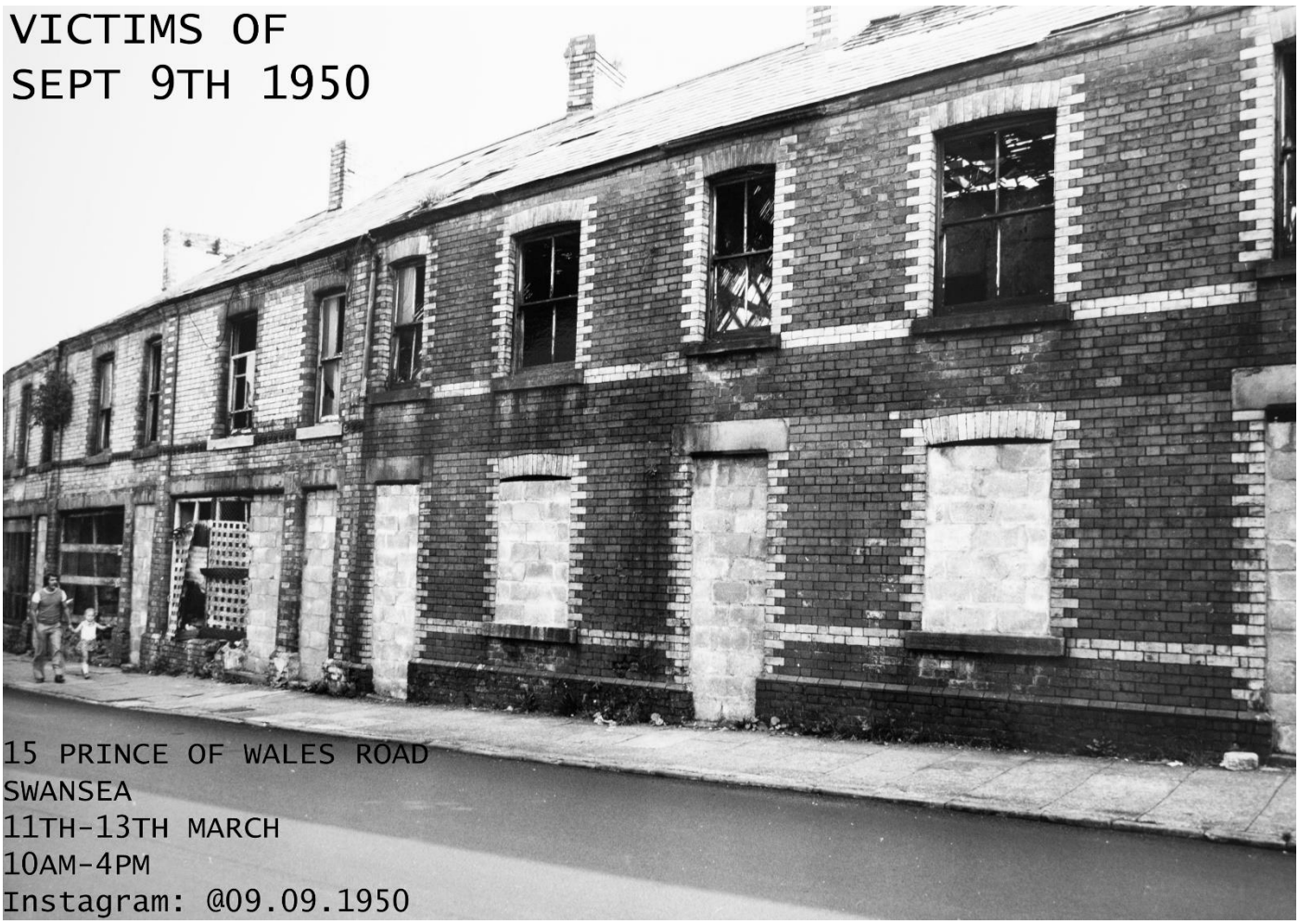
# VICTIMS OF SEPT 9TH 1950

A group exhibition held by four UWTSD
Photography students commemorating
the disaster that took place on
Prince Of Wales Road
on the 9th September 1950.

15 PRINCE OF WALES ROAD, SWANSEA
11TH-13TH MARCH
10AM-4PM

This is our more informative poster, I made this to look like the note that was attached to the fence in 2018. This one was kept simpler as there was no space for the information with the image.

Whilst creating the leaflets I decided that it might be interesting if the leaflet could double up as the poster.




Therefore the front of the leaflet is our poster, however all the information has been put to one side so the front page of our leaflet had the information instead of having to open it up in order to read the info. The name of our exhibition is '*Victims of Sept 9th 1950*' we decided to name the exhibition after the note, again bringing our work full circle.

This project was inspired by the Prince of Wales Road disaster. Very little is known about the incident that took place at 6AM on Saturday the 9th of September, 1950. We are using our project as a platform to bring awareness to this tragic event 70 years after it happened.

As a collective we have created an installation piece in the 'living room' of 15 Prince of Wales Road, this room gives context behind the event. The video depicts the sight next to the house at 6AM. Behind the projection you will see a collated arrangement of the images we found during our investigation.

Eloise Davidson

When researching the history of the area, we learnt that the area was once heavily populated by Jewish immigrants and became known as "Jews Row". I was particularly interested in the lives of these immigrants, specifically the story of one of the victims of the disaster, Samuel Belkin. Belkin was a Russian war veteran, who moved to the road in 1906 with his wife and niece and spoke no English. In 1918, Belkin was charged for failing to notify the police of his nieces' presence as was required of immigrants, (known as Aliens) during the first world war. My work undertakes an installation piece entitled alien, aiming to induce feelings of disorientation and experimenting with the viewers perception, intending to mirror the feeling of being in an unfamiliar place with no means of understanding what is going on, just as Belkin may of felt himself.

Benjamin Bainbridge

Due to this event not being overly well documented, several inconsistencies would appear in either maps or other archival credentials. Its the idea of this event being overshadowed by the blitzs and how all the information hides the relevance of the disaster. Its for this reason I want to use newspaper between the dates of 1940 to 1960 placed across the house as metaphor for how hides what happened.

Katy James

My work in the kitchen is using newspapers as a filter, telling the story of September 9th through the means of the time. I have chosen to display on the windows as they look directly onto the site of the collapse, this replicates how the windows of the old ruined houses were blocked out, and how the incident was unintentionally covered up by the local council as the demolition and rebuild costs were catergorised under war reconstruction costs. By layering the newspapers, they act as a mask, however the site is still visible. This is a retelling of what actually.

Catrin Morris

I decided that I wanted to work with the outside space, although I didn't want to create work directly about the event, as there was very little I could do without being distasteful and creating a museum piece. I decided that I very simply wanted to pay tribute to the event and those affected, therefore I created a commemerative plaque, as I was aware that our group could not create work about this tragedy without paying tribute and rasing awareness long term. I replaced the worn out note that was left in 2018 with the plaque. This location overlooks the now thriving space the houses used to stand.

For the inside of our leaflet I wrote a little synopsis on what the overall exhibition theme, and the work we created together in the living room of 15 Prince of Wales, later titled 'Discovery' due to the installation piece being informative. I asked Eloise, Ben and Katy to write about their ideas as concisely as they could. I used the centre of the leaflet as a collage of the photos we discovered, I later suggested we exhibit the photos in the same manner, to mimic a tv detectives investigation board. Unfortunately as a group we all fall quite short with our proof reading skills, as on two occasions we have failed to spot simple errors, once in Katy's piece, then later in my plaque (once it had arrived and I had met with my friend Toby who had offered to help me put it up, he pointed out that I had used the wrong effected/affected, unfortunately as a second language English speaker I was completely unaware that there was a variation of the word until the plaque we had paid for had arrived).

As irritating as my mistake was, we agreed that it could be argued that the effects of this disaster still ripple through the families who lost loved ones during this disaster.

Once the plaque arrived, we were free to start putting up the exhibition. We worked as a group to put up all the works, however we all had a specific concept that was ours.

As a group we decided we wanted to create an installation piece. We wanted this piece to be informative, yet artistic. We had the idea of making a video, that presented the most important information we had discovered. We had the idea of filming outside on the site of collapse, in between a gap in the trees where you can see down onto the road down on the Strand, I suggested the video be shot at 6AM, the time the tragedy occurred, this would make the clip dark, I then suggested we install the images we had found on the wall

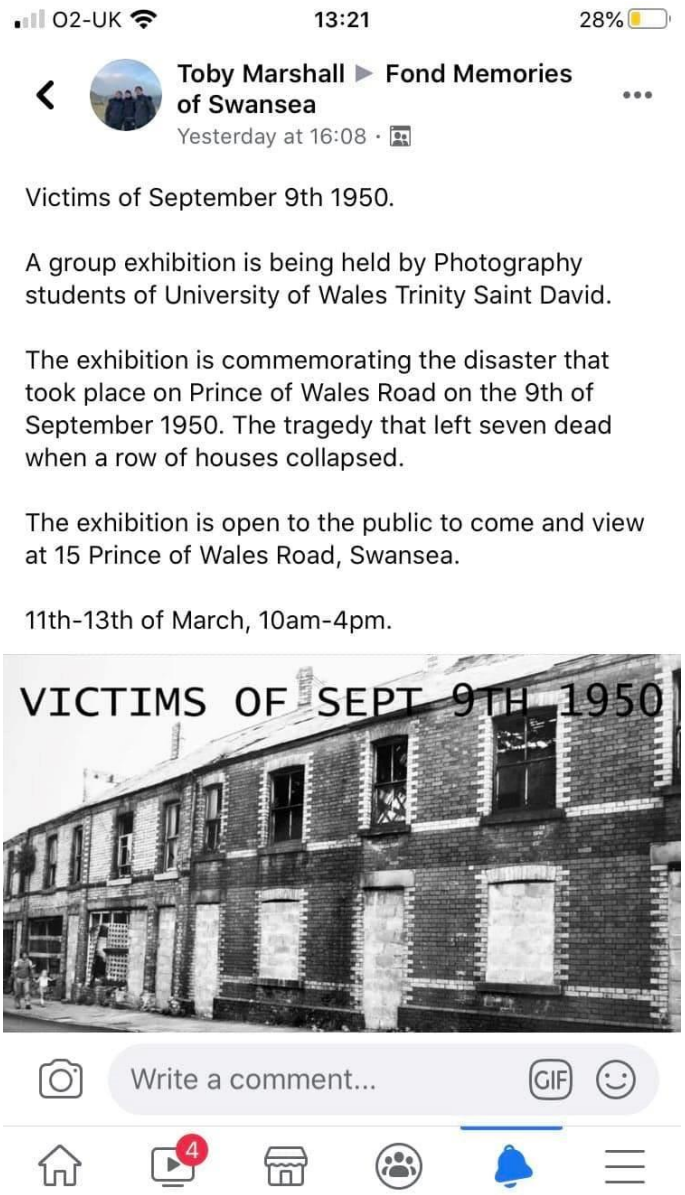
behind the projection, and once we had finished presenting what we had find the clip would lighten up until white, and the projector would light up the images, and the viewer could then discover the images. We tried to record the audio as professionally yet as relaxed as possible, for the viewer to feel as if we were almost conversing with them, although in hindsight it sounded rushed, and unprofessional.

We worked as a group to black out the windows of the house and put up Katys work in the kitchen. After the work had finished been put up, Toby (my friend on a UWTSD engineering course) and came to help me install my plaque. As previously discussed the plaque was placed on the same part of fencing as the note, however we agreed that we could not remove the original note, no matter how tattered it was, as the land surrounding the house needed to remain as authentic as possible, and I also do not think it is our place to remove this piece, that is now a part of the roads history as much as the disaster is, nor is there any need for it to be removed. I had decided soon into the project that I would like to use the outside space to exhibit, but I hadn't decoded until the last two weeks what I would do. I finally came to the realisation that I didn't need to do anything but place the plaque. In contrast to the house that was meant to feel like a time capsule, leaving the house should ground the viewer, bring them to the realisation how little care has been taken to commemorate this tragedy, how the location it happened on has been left to essentially rot away like wasteland, and now acts like a piece of wild, overgrown garden that welcomes all manner of rubbish. The land itself is truly its own piece of art. I also planned that I would not initially take anyone to my plaque, that I would let the viewer decide by themselves what the rest of the exhibition should be, and if they discovered the plaque it would be a plus. I think it is important people know about what happened, but I wanted to symbolise how after we take down the exhibition the plaque would simply just act as an invitation for people to dig deeper and find out what the plaque was actually commemorating, therefore its important people take their own journey down, the same as we had our own journey learning this story. My plaque was what tied the whole exhibition together, gave us the ability to be able to 'exploit' these peoples story, but pay our respects, it was overall our exhibitions final piece.

My piece is also a political piece. I (with help) attached this plaque to the fence (that belongs to the council) without permission. As the request would undoubtedly be rejected due to budget cuts, and they would insist it would cost them something, but also the local

councils silly mistakes are also how the tragedy was accidentally covered up and forgotten, the fence that is now there almost hides the plot of land, it stops you from being able to access the site, I see the fence as the symbol of how Swansea City council unintentionally prohibited anyone from knowing the story, however our project is bringing this history back to the surface, the same as we've literally pot riveted the plaque to the surface of the fence. I assumed once the plaque was up, and the exhibition was over but had already raised awareness the Council could not remove the piece without causing uproar. Although my piece is far simpler, I like to think that the act resonates with the work of the GUERRILLA GIRLS. What we've made is in no way as important as the subjects they tackle, however, in a similar fashion our work is in someway calling someone out.

The evening before the exhibition a friend posted about our exhibition to a page, he was a part of, and gained us a fair amount of publicity.




Overall I am very happy with what we did, although very simple I feel it had more of an effect on so many old residents of the houses than I could have ever imagined, and they were more than thankful for what we had done for them. After this exhibition comes to an

end, I think it's very interesting that we as a collective will become anonymous, we do not matter to the story, we were merely a platform to tell it. After all we do not need recognition to be able to appreciate what we've accomplished.

I have sent a letter to the council, to ask permission to tidy up a little around that general area, make this a beautiful place of tribute, instead of it being a completely disrespected piece of historical land. However, I am yet to get a reply.

15 Prince of Wales Road

Swansea

SA1 2EX

March 9th, 2020

Swansea City & County Council

Civic Centre

Oystermouth Rd

Swansea

SA1 3SN

Dear whomever this may concern,

We are a collective of Photographers that attend UWTSD. We have recently completed a project about the tragic events that occurred on the morning of September 9th, 1950. This project was inspired by the Prince of Wales Road disaster. We realised that very little is now known about the incident that took place at 6AM that Saturday. We are using our project as a platform to bring awareness to this tragic event 70 years after it happened.

We would like to propose that we tidy up the area at the end of the street, the plot of land beside 15 Prince of Wales Road, get rid of the weeds, tidy back the bushes, plant some flowers, etc. We aim to make the location tidier and safer. We would like to do this in order to pay tribute to those affected by the event, turn a location that holds very bitter memories, to a beautiful place that people can visit and pay their respects.

After tidying it we plan on trying to find a group that live local to Swansea that would be here to uphold the plot, as we are students and will only be here another year. We have already been given means to contact a few groups that may consider helping us.

We are not asking for money, we would just like permission to work on this plot of land. And if there's anything you could offer to help; we would welcome suggestions.

Yours Faithfully

Catrin Morris.

On behalf of the ***Victims of Sept 9th 1950*** group

After the exhibition finishes we intend on trying to tidy up and make the land next to Katy's house more presentable, but we are mostly aiming to create a website, gain publicity, just overall bring this disaster back into the publics attention in time for its 70th anniversary.