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Alfred Russel Wallace Glyntaff Upper Campus

(University Of South Wales)

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(Image: A – The Alfred Russel Wallace Building)



Introduction

The Glamorgan Centre for Art and Design (Full Report For Listed Buildings) , also known as Alfred Raussel Wallace building (Grammar School for Girls School; Glyntaff College, University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, n.d.) is a type 2 listed building located within Pontypridd, Glyntaff overlooking Treforest. This building is used and owned by the University of South Wales with a focus on the Health, Nursing and science related subjects (University Of South Wales, n.d.). This building was built in 1912 and opened in 1913 by A O Evans, Williams and Evans, Pontypridd architects.

The original function of this building was as a grammar school for girls. The school housed an assembly hall with a balcony also used as a gymnasium, a library, art room, eight classrooms and a furnished flat where girls were educated in housewifery. In 1922 additional construction of classrooms were built at the rear with further renovations added in 1935 with a new dining hall and kitchen. The school remained a grammar school until the change to the comprehensive system in 1973 and subsequently became an art college (Full Report For Listed Buildings). This has later changed within the 2020's into a science focused university space (University Of South Wales, n.d.).

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Architectural Design Analysis

(Image: B – The Alfred Russel Wallace Building)



The Alfred Russel Wallace building was designed in the baroque style as a 2-storey school in red brick with small-pane pivoting and sash windows, with slate roofing (Full Report For Listed Buildings). The school has a symmetrical core that reaches out curving forward with flanking gabled wings. The design highlights vertical segments with grounded straight edged windows and pilasters which then shift into curved rhythmic arches along the second storey. The arches are used as a showcasing design element that captures focus like with the main entrance, the second-floor focal windows, and the central tower Esque element above the entrance. These vertical segments of the design then conclude with high reaching peaks emerging from the simple parapets that subtly push the eyeline towards the central pyramidal roof peak with its more defined aesthetic. (Full Report For Listed Buildings) (University Of South Wales,, n.d.)

The window frame is white sitting within a red brick and grey mortar walls. The amount of windows allows for the maximum amount of light to enter the school and its white colour creates a light open atmosphere, in conjunction with the pilasters that sit forward, it creates interesting depth and layering within the design while maintaining simplicity additionally, the pilasters placement creates subtle shadows on the behind wall of the windows, creating a natural line weight which only enhances the experience and focal points of its design.

The schools wings roofs ascend on its way towards the core central short tower, which is an additional design element that leads the eye focus and allows the design to hug the viewer in a way that encourages the viewer to move further into and towards the design, however, this effect isn't perfect as the left side expands further than the right which creates a sense of uneven proportions. On the wings, the use of skylights becomes more prevalent clearly shown from

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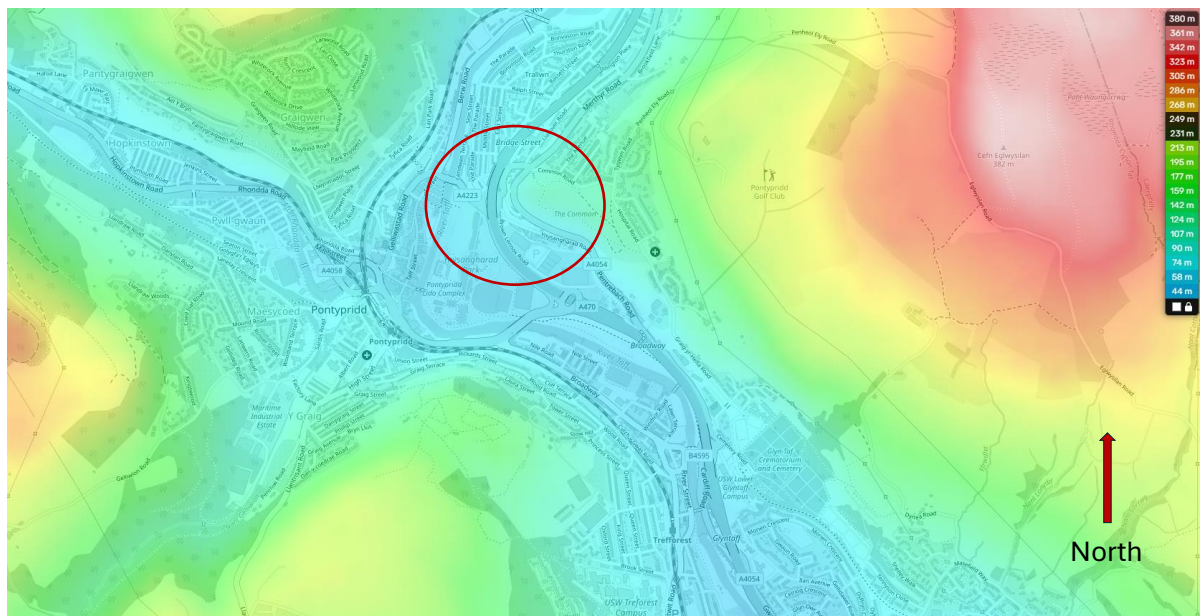
the glass panel wall of the bridge connecting the original wing to the newly built diagonal building segment. This segment although disrupting the overall aesthetic of the Alfred Russel Wallace building, does have functional benefits like additional space and the linked bridge connecting to the rear building, the George Knox building. (Historic Environment Scotland, Historic England, Cadw, Welsh Government)

The materials grounded atmosphere with the light colours, natural décor and ornamental detailing creates a strong grounded silhouette of an institution while maintaining an open airiness and defined character, perfect as an educational facility.

The main negative of the school's design is the newly built flank, the far left structure which is a different architectural style that fails to mesh well with the original core design, its dramatic roofing and angled design throws off the eye impacting the natural rhythm of its experience. It lacks the strong focus on windows and layered detail of the pilasters which disrupts the designs continuity and natural flow.

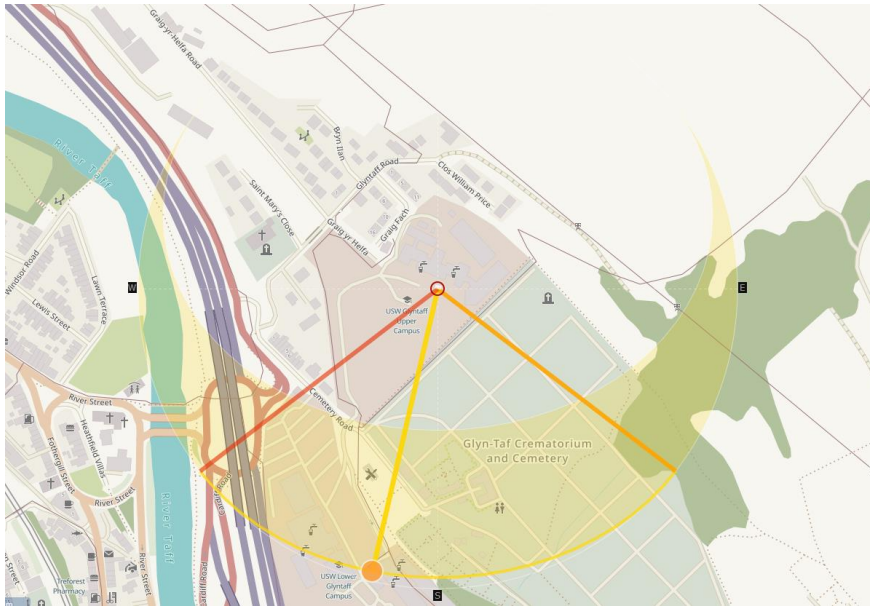
The Site Context

(Image: C – Topographic Map of Pontypridd, The location of the Alfred Russel Wallace building) (topographic map, n.d.)



(Image: D – Sun Path of the Alfred Russel Wallace building's location) (Suncalc, n.d.)

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The school is located within Pontypridd, at a high altitude of 124m highlighting drastic terrain elevations due to the city altitude being at 74m. This placement is located perfectly from a view and light perspective as it overlooks the River Taff and the surrounding town (Rendeiro, 2026) (Full Report For Listed Buildings). The upper Glyntaff campus building is oriented towards the southwest utilising the sun setting light. The University of South Wales campus is located within dense vegetation and natural spaces which only adds to the generated atmosphere. The buildings height uses the mountains peak line in an effective and aesthetically pleasing way due to the pleasant background it provides to the school. However, the circulation of the property and the pathway to access it are long and very steep, disconnected from the rest of the university campus buildings within Glyntaff; additionally, the overall lacking nearby establishments provides very few options for students and pedestrians nearby (Rendeiro, 2026).

Technical Information

Due to the overall lack of information of the technical detail of the school, this segment will involve speculation. The Alfred Russel Wallace Buildings construction process was most likely solid wall construction with lime based mortar due to cavity walls only achieving popularity after world war 1. (Historic Environment Scotland, Historic England, Cadw, Welsh Government) However the extensions in 1935 and later were most likely timber framed cavity walls with a brick cladding due to the resurgence of its popularity and overall benefits. Timber frame construction is very likely especially within the roof for this time-period (post medieval) (University Of South Wales, n.d.) (Historic Environment Scotland, Historic England, Cadw, Welsh Government). The expected foundation could potentially be a stepped brick foundation.

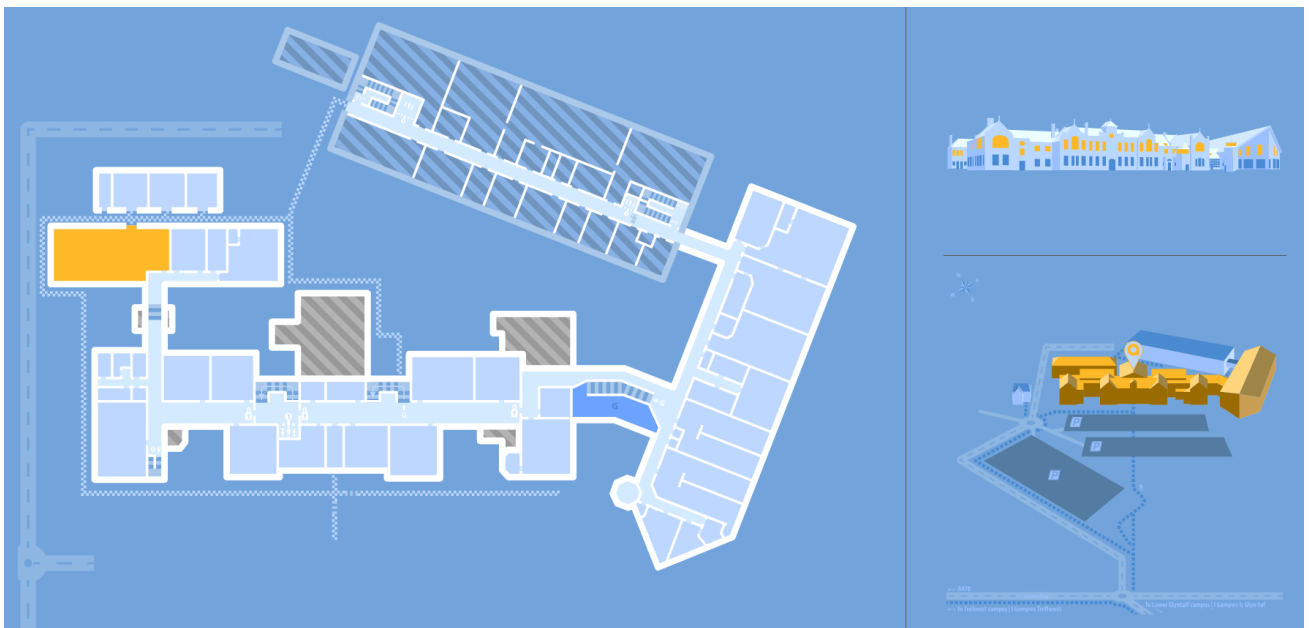
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(Image: E - Ground Floor Floorplan– Alfred Russel Wallace building) (University Of South Wales, n.d.)



The ground floorplan for the Alfred Russel Wallace building consists of 58 active rooms. The overall basic design of the floorplan centres and shares a singular hallway; this feature is practical and an efficient room structure and layout however there exists potential issues with hallway space considering the amount of students moving throughout its hallways in any one time. The floorplan does utilise natural light, especially within the main glass hallway and atrium space indicated within the green circles. There are backdoors shown in various places indicating multiple access points to the rear space between the Alfred Russel Wallace Building and the George Knox Building; this feature provides additional circulation, allowing for students in either side of the flanking wings to access each other efficiently. The simplistic design of the ground floorplan promotes intuitive movement throughout the space. (Rendeiro, 2026) (University Of South Wales, n.d.)

(Image: F - 1st Floor Floorplan – Alfred Russel Wallace building) (University Of South Wales, n.d.)



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The 1st floor floorplan is nearly identical to the ground floorplan with a few caveats. The upper floor has a total of 42 rooms within the Alfred Russel Wallace building however it directly connects to the George Knox building via a bridge, this feature improves circulation and options to access the additional building, however; the upper floor has tighter hallways, especially within the right flank, new addition space furthermore, there is a sharp disparity in the number of rooms between floors. The floorplan still highlights the glass panelled hallway and is designed around the central hallway.

(Image: G – The Alfred Russel Wallace building perspective image in 1932) (Grammar School for Girls School; Glyntaff College, University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, n.d.)



In the above image, its purpose is to act as a comparison between the present-day imagery of the school in 2026 to the pre-renovation version in 1932. As shown, the entire right flank, glass panelled hallway and the George Knox building are not shown, following the construction history stated previously. One could say that this building in 1932 is the truest and most authentic version of itself; this opinion is based on its complete symmetry, stylistic continuity and purpose of existence being education in its original form by Welsh architects. (Full Report For Listed Buildings) (University Of South Wales,, n.d.)

Conclusion – Welsh architecture

This building is widely considered as a stunning example of the baroque style, maintaining its simplicity and authenticity until its final extension of the right flank which is arguably a stain and poorly considered structure that fails to continue the originals essence and baroque style.

The Alfred Russel Wallace building was a building that is widely ignored and unappreciated, evident by the serve lack of academic study or reports on the school; this made finding relevant information on this building near impossible and speaks to the lack of recognition that truly Welsh architecture receives especially within the valleys which inhabit and continue a more authentic Welsh culture. This building was designed by Pontypridd architects with a more subdued baroque style likely constructed with locally sourced materials like the red brick (The Brickworks of Mid Glamorgan, Bridgend and the Taff, Rhondda and Cynon Valleys, n.d.).

A person could call into doubt the Welsh authenticity of the Alfred Russel Wallace building by referencing its baroque style originating from Italy, however, it could be argued that this school is hybridised version of the

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style due to the active influence of the Welsh culture values, locally sourced materials and the natural mutation that occurs within architectural styles. The Welsh architects adapted the style of Italian baroque to fit the local needs of the Pontypridd town (Frampton). Additionally, there's an argument to be made that the locally sourced materials of the Alfred Russel Wallace building create a direct connection to the Welsh geology reflecting Welsh landscape in placement and craft traditions from the Welsh labourers involved in its construction. It was designed and built for the Welsh people. These arguments for some outweigh the stylistic origin in relation to Welsh authenticity (Hilling).

Whether the Alfred Russel Wallace building is considered truly Welsh architecture depends on how one defines Welshness. If that is defined purely by architectural style, The Alfred Russel Wallace building cannot be considered Welsh; this definition would further impose that a significant amount of architecture produced in the last 500 years in Wales as not Welsh. However, if the definition is broadened and instead judged by the placement, materials, craftsmanship, construction and cultural function, then this school is Welsh in certainty; as a building designed by Welsh architects, placed and integrated into a Welsh town, built with Welsh materials by Welsh craftsmen; and furthermore, adapted to a Welsh climate.

Word Count: 1803

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By: Tyler Williams - 2204225

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