

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

CONSERVATION AREA	Alexandra Road
Date of Notification:-	1986
National Grid Reference:-	SS 6545093400
O.S. 1:10,000 Sheet No.:-	SS 69 SE
Conservation Area No.:-	CA:022

Notes:-

The area proposed for designation comprises the historic group of public buildings on both sides of Alexandra Road and the 19th Century terrace houses along Gore Terrace, Clifton Hill and Pleasant Street.

Between the area adjacent to High Street Station and the more middle class houses of Dynevor Place lay an area of poor housing, described as "Back Street and its lanes and alleys". This area was built up between 1803 and 1823 in response to the initial rise in the town's population.

The houses were built of local sandstone with a moderate amount of brickwork used in chimneys, flues and around door and window openings, this being the normal combination of materials used for the walls of most 19th Century Swansea houses. They contained only one room on each floor. The front walls of the houses each contained two sash windows, one above the other and the front door. The rear had a door but no window. The openings for the ground window and the front door had semi-circular arched heads, the arch being filled with a recessed panel of brickwork above the door or window frame. This was a characteristic feature of many of the small houses erected in Swansea in the first three decades of the 19th Century and demonstrated a humble echo of the large arched windows used in Georgian houses.

The only part of this area now standing is the group of houses in Pleasant Street (built c. 1813-23) and the houses continuing up Clifton Hill, both groups superior to their long vanished neighbours.

The Pleasant Street houses and three of the Clifton Hill examples still retain the arched recesses above their front doors.

In 1876 the Swansea Town Council obtained an Order under the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwelling Improvement Act of 1875 to remove the slums in five areas of the town. The Act provided the first instrument for Councils to initiate a comprehensive concept of urban renewal. By 1881 Swansea was one of eight towns and cities in Britain which had actually acquired slum property and cleared it.

The clearance of the Back Street area was carried out between 1876 and 1880 coupled with the lay out of Alexandra Road. Alexandra Road was constructed in 1879, originally called Yeo Street after Frank Ash Yeo, a prominent Councillor who was largely responsible for the clearance of the area. The name was changed in

October 1881, following the visit of the Prince of Wales and Princess Alexandra to Swansea.

Alexandra Road was designed as a "Grand Boulevard" which would sweep visitors directly into the town centre from the Great Western Railway station at High Street. The scheme demonstrated a rather cosmetic provision to enhance Swansea's tourist reputation. Up to 1879 train passengers at High Street had to face all the visual diversity of a working class slum.

Between 1887 and the First World War a number of very fine public buildings were erected on both sides of Alexandra Road. Inadequacy of the old premises coupled with the availability of big publicly owned sites in a town centre location led to the erection of the Working Mens Club and Institute (1885), the Central Library (1887), the BBC Building (1899), the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery (1909/11) and the Central Police Station (1913).

These buildings designed in a rich classical and baroque revival style were just part of the impressive curve of buildings along the "Grand Boulevard" which formed a splendid streetscape and an attractive urban space.

Due to war time destruction and post-war reconstruction, road construction in particular, much of the original character of the area is gone leaving the historic group of public buildings a clustered solitaire rather than an integrated ensemble.