

## CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

<b>LISTED BUILDING</b>	The Guildhall, Swansea
<b>Grade:-</b>	I
<b>Date of Notification:-</b>	25.07.94
<b>National Grid Reference:-</b>	SS 6436092400
<b>O.S. 1:10000 Sheet No:-</b>	SS 69 SW
<b>CADW Reference No:-</b>	14594
<b>C &amp; C of S Reference No:-</b>	LB:274

### **Notes:-**

Between Guildhall Road North and Guildhall Road South, to NE of Victoria Park.

### ***History:-***

1930-34 by (Sir) Percy Thomas, of Cardiff, architect, in a Neo-classical style incorporating modern, especially Scandinavian, influences. Conceived as Civic Centre including municipal offices, council suite, law courts and public hall. Competition 1929. Works began 1930, benefiting from central government funds to relieve unemployment. Foundation stone laid May 1932. Alterations to interior designs of concert hall 1933 to accommodate the British Empire Panels by (Sir) Frank Brangwyn; panels had been commissioned as memorial to fallen in First World War, to hang in Palace of Westminster, but felt to be unsuitable. Official opening 23 October 1934. Building won RIBA bronze medal 1936, as best building in Wales in preceding 3 year period. Major extensions utilising central courtyard date from 1964-65, and 1974-76; 1970's work by Messrs Percy Thomas & Co. of Cardiff, architects.

Plan & Materials: Generally 2 storeys (but 3 storeys to main NW block) with ground floor sunk to semi-basement level; high parapet. Plan consists of 4 blocks disposed round central suites, and council chamber to rear, SE block is Brangwyn Hall; SW block is law courts; NW block is municipal offices; offices inc central courtyard. Portland stone facing over brick and concrete, yellow brick to central courtyard; small pane metal windows, lead rainwater goods with decorated hopper heads.

### ***Exterior:-***

NE block (Civic suites) is surmounted by tapering central clock tower circa 48m high; tower had octagonal panelled dome, corner antefixes, open loggia has arches with inset piers of columns with entablature bearing urns; ship's prows flanked by medallions; clock to each face. Taller centre of block set forward; square panelling to parapet; giant arch to entrance has coffered soffit and glazed bronze screen with bronze doorcase with pediment; steps to entrance flanked by polygonal bronze lamps. Two-storey wings have banded rustication to ground floor; 5 windows to each floor, upper windows with shallow architraves; to ends (set back) further 3 windows to each floor; returns have 5 windows, centre emphasised by architrave and balcony to upper floor, and doorframe with medallions to ground floor.

SW block (Brangwyn Hall) has parapet with roundels depicting the arts. Lower entrance block has panelled frieze; steps up to three deep arches with coffered soffits; glazed

bronze gills and panelled bronze doors; to each side of central arch. bronze lamp mounted on wall; window to each end with bronze grille; steps up to entrance have podium to each end. To L of entrance, lower block with 3 windows; return to L has 3 windows centre emphasised by architrave and balcony to upper floor, and doorframe with medallions to ground floor.

SW block comprises law courts linked to flanking blocks by flying passages which have segmental arches and relief medallions; square panelling to parapet and royal arms to front. Tall coffered arch to central entrance with bronze glazed screen and pedimented doorcase with panelled doors; entrances to public galleries in jambs of arch; bronze lamps to each side. Four windows to each side of arch; returns of 10 windows; 4 lunettes about lighting courtrooms and assize hall. Rear, facing courtyard has round arch withinset Portland stone pedimented doorcase surmounted by relief of scales of justice.

NW block is municipal offices; return to R has 3 windows centre emphasised by architrave and balcony to upper floor, and doorframe with medallions to ground floor. Long elevation of 20 windows (22 to top floor); central coffered arch with glazed bronze screen and bronze entrance doorframe with pediment; above arch, low relief of Swansea arms inscription 'Municipal Offices'; parapet has roundels with functions of council. In central courtyard later extensions. Earlier (1960's) extension in yellow brick to house city's computer. Second extension (1970's) hung from steel frame erected round computer building. Walls of banded windows and Portland stone.

### ***Interior:-***

The interiors of the building are the finest in Wales of their period, and particularly in the formal public areas are almost unaltered NE block (surmounted by tower) contains council suites. Entrance foyer (full height of building) faced with stone, vaulted gilded coffered ceiling, floors in travertine with green marble patterning. To each side bronze gates (Egyptian style) to stairs down to lower ground floor with Rates Hall with plaster roundels of coins minted in Wales. Grand staircase (gilded coffered ceiling, and bronze handrails with Viking ships' prows) up to grand corridor (stone doorcases with grotesque heads to L and R) and portal to Antechamber in Roman Doric style, coffered barrel-vaulted ceiling; to ends, entrances to reception room (L) and robing room (R) have arches with inset columns and entablature bearing urns, lunettes over; portal to lobby of council chamber. Lobby connects to Council chamber, top lit, with fluted Ionic columns in Australian walnut (at time of construction at circa 7m largest ever built); Australian walnut panelling to walls with ebony banding; tapestry frieze above panelling represents Gorsedd procession. Horseshoe benches (Australian Walnut), upholstered seating with Swansea arms; enclosure to mayoral seat backed by screen with pediment; in centre of horseshoe, table and upholstered chairs; public/press benches to rear. Fittings include original lighting, and gilt bronze fittings with Welsh symbols e.g. leek, and goat on radiator grilles. Reception Room has minstrels' gallery with railings in form of music stave, with notes and violin bows, Doric columns to main doorway, classicising doorcases, heraldic shields of Swansea families, corridor flanked by offices and committee rooms with walnut panelling and screens, art deco chimney pieces, original tables and chairs. SE Block has councilors' library, and corridor to George Hall with coffered ceiling, broad fluted pilasters, palmette frieze, reliefs of tragic and comic masks and of drama through the ages e.g. Commedia dell'arte, C16 and C17 theatre fanlights to end walls to Brangwyn Hall, large rectangular concert hall (approx 49m x 19m x 13.5m), deeply coffered ceiling with original polygonal bronze and glass light fittings; broad fluted pilasters, panelled frieze band; rectangular clerestorey windows. Walls faced with acoustic tiles imulating Portland stone and have walnut-panelled dado.

Walls hung with the Brangwyn Panels, 18 paintings up to 6m x 4m in size, depicting nations and people, flora and fauna of the British Empire. Deep stage/concert platform has large gilt bronze grilles to organ pipework. Entrance lobby of Brangwyn Hall has groined vault to ceiling (tympana to ends with relief decoration), floor in travertine and marble, classicising archtraves to doors; two polygonal bronze booths, bronze inner doors. Corridor on 3 sides of hall; artists' rooms to rear of stage.

SW block comprises Law Courts; two courtrooms (civil and criminal) aligned side-by-side; top lit, simple classicising details, coffered ceiling, panelled frieze, lunette windows to outer walls, public galleries to SW. Assize hall has coffered barrel-vaulted ceiling (original polygonal bronze and glass light fittings); 2 bridges to public galleries carried on 4 Greek Doric columns, lunette with large low relief of early law-giving in Wales; corridors with offices to outer walls of court block.

NW block is municipal offices with central corridors flanked by offices; simple classical details.

Graded I as the most important building in Wales of its period, with a particularly fine and virtually unaltered sequence of public spaces, and as an outstanding example of the work of an architect of particular significance to Wales.

***References:-***

J R Alban (Ed), The Guildhall Swansea, Swansea 1984.