

Vulcan Public House, Adamsdown, Cardiff

The Vulcan was inspected in 1991 (Cardiff Bay Resurvey), in c1998 (Adamstown resurvey), and again in 2003. More recent informal inspection has been carried out in order to confirm these earlier assessments, which had concluded that it was not listable, and also to take into account new information about the historical development of the building.

Architectural Interest

According to this new information, the building dates from c1853, and there are records tracing its history back to about this date. I have considered this carefully, but have concluded that the architectural character of the building suggests a date more recent than that - perhaps late C19 (the general form of the building, and some of the detail - the brickwork of the chimneys, for example). The information from Graham Craig suggests that the tiled façade dates from 1901 – this date would be consistent with the *art nouveau* style of the tile work, and may even date the entire facade. Alterations in 1914 are also documented (the work of F.J.Veall). These appear to concern the interior only – the eccentric positioning of chimneys suggests that an earlier plan with a central cross wall on both floors was modified to create a single front bar. The small scale of this work would make it difficult to claim the Vulcan as a significant example of his work, which is better represented in other listed buildings in Cardiff and Ebbw Vale. The likely development history for the building is therefore as follows: original building c1853, rebuilt/extensively remodelled c1900, altered internally 1914.

Because listing is based on the architectural character of the building, Cadw has to assess it as effectively a building of c1900- 1914, rather than a building of c1850. After about 1840, greater selection is necessary to identify best examples of particular building types, and only buildings of definite quality and character are listed. For C20 buildings, Cadw is required to identify key examples for a range of building types.

The general architectural character of the Vulcan is unexceptional, and the quality of the tiled frontage is its main claim to any distinction. There are better examples of this characteristic feature of late C19/early C20 pub architecture – in Cardiff the Golden Cross, which was designed for a corner site and also has a tiled interior, and the former Queens Vaults, also designed for a corner site.

Cadw's attention is also drawn to the interior, which is said to have remained unaltered since 1914. The general layout – of front bar and rear lounge (originally a smoke room) - has been preserved (though an earlier guide to Cardiff suggested that the rear had been domestic accommodation until c1950), but the detail of the interior has been changed since 1914. The 1914 plans show two fireplaces in the front bar, and a curved-fronted servery partially in front of the rear window, and enclosing a small office. Now, a single fireplace remains, and the bar itself (the servery) has been pushed

back towards the back wall, (where the office had once been) – it now has an angled, rather than a curved, front. Other pubs preserve the multi-room plan, so that this is not exceptional (eg the Royal Oak PH, Adamstown – late C19). The survival of a glazed partition between the bar and the corridor would not in itself be sufficient to warrant listing.

Historic Interest/Historical Association

The listing criteria enable Cadw to consider historical associations where these relate to figures or events of Welsh importance. It does not enable Cadw to evaluate the cultural significance of contemporary figures.

Graham Craig's information suggests that the Vulcan has social significance as the sole remaining building linked to Newtown, the part of Cardiff which housed Irish immigrant labourers in the 1840s and 1850s, associated with the building of Cardiff Docks. Sad to say, the social historical significance of this association is undermined firstly because the building is not preserved in a way that confirms and illustrates this association - it has been either rebuilt or substantially remodelled since the mid C19 - and secondly because it lacks meaningful context or group value. Although the criteria enable us to take social history into account (it being possible to list buildings of importance to the nation's social and economic history), it would be difficult to argue that the Vulcan was of more than local significance for social history; difficult also to regard it as a direct link to the mid C19 history of this part of Cardiff when the building's architectural character relates to a later period; problematic to allow a single building to represent the social history of an entire neighbourhood – the housing which has now been lost would have been a far more powerful testimony to the social history of Newtown.

It has also been suggested in Rachel Thomas's letter of 19th February, that the Vulcan PH characterises Cardiff's history. It would be very difficult to argue persuasively that a single building somehow encapsulates the history of the city – many buildings could claim to contribute to different aspects of the historical character of the city – including those Victorian and Edwardian pubs which have already been listed. I think the broader point being made here is that the distinctiveness of the city is being eroded by commercial developments. This may be a valid point, but it does not furnish us with sufficient justification in support of listing, where the assessment must be based on the specific architectural and historic merits of the individual building, and where the criteria guide us to be selective.

Cultural Associations

The criteria for listing also enable us to consider buildings which illustrate important aspects of the nation's cultural history. Several cultural associations with the Vulcan have been put forward (Frank Hennessy has performed there, writers such as John Williams, Des Barry and Tessa Hadley have met there, and other famous patrons have included Neil Kinnock). These are all broadly contemporary associations, which fall out-with the scope of the criteria for listing. It is simply too soon to assess the significance of any of

these figures to the cultural history of the nation; nor could the specific role of the Vulcan in the formation and development of their work be easily demonstrated.

In conclusion, although there is clearly a strong case to be made for the local significance of the Vulcan, and for its contemporary social and cultural value, there are insufficient grounds to support a recommendation for listing.

Cadw
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