

**Submission
No 166**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Organisation: Australian Society for History of Engineering and Technology
Inc. (ASHET)

Date received: 19 August 2016

Dear Ms Thompson

I wish to make a submission to the Inquiry into Museums and Galleries in NSW. I am making this submission on behalf of members of the Australian Society for History of Engineering and Technology Inc. (ASHET).

I attach a copy of a letter previously sent from ASHET to the Premier which outlines the Society's position on the proposed relocation of the Powerhouse Museum from Ultimo to Parramatta.

I can be contacted by phone on _____, or by post at _____, or by return email, if further information is requested from the Committee.

Yours sincerely
Robert Renew
President, ASHET



Australian Society for History of Engineering and Technology Incorporated (ASHET)

OBJECTIONS TO PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE POWERHOUSE MUSEUM

This Society has expressed its alarm and deep concern to the Premier the Hon. Mike Baird MP about the NSW Government's plans to relocate the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta. The Society has also recorded its strong objections about the potential threat to the integrity of the former Ultimo Power House buildings if they are converted to some other use or indeed to their very survival, should the Government's plan proceed and the site be sold.

Since 1988, the Powerhouse Museum has played a vital part in public education about the role of engineering and technology in the development of New South Wales and Australia. The importance of the location of the Powerhouse Museum in the city cannot be overstated: while the Society applauds the Government's plans to develop the cultural life of Western Sydney, it should not be at the expense of a wonderful existing facility that resonates within its urban environment, as it has done for 120 years.

The current location of the Powerhouse Museum capitalises on the synergies created by its proximity to the University of Technology Sydney and the Sydney Institute of Technology. This supports in spirit and in practice current policies to restore the focus on STEM subjects in the education sector.

The Ultimo Power House was built in 1897-99 to serve Sydney's first electric tramway system that, by the 1920s, was one of the largest in the world. Electric trams revolutionised the city of Sydney as no other form of public transportation has done and the Ultimo Power House was at the heart of this vast network. In these terms alone, the Ultimo Power House buildings are among Sydney's most historically significant. In 1994, the Institution of Engineers Australia recognised their heritage importance by placing an historic marker on the building fabric bearing the inscription, in part, "the first large power station in New South Wales." In this Society's view, the very real threat to the continued preservation of the Power House buildings represents a brutal assault on all the gains of the past 40 years to recognise and preserve Sydney's wonderful built heritage.

The decision by a previous state government in 1979 to preserve the Power House buildings and adaptively re-use them to display and interpret the collections of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences was inspired and far-sighted. One of the most significant aspects of the Museum's collections is engineering and steam technology. At the core of this collection is the 1785 Boulton & Watt beam engine, an object so pivotal in the history of industrialisation that it is beyond a dollar value. The painstaking reconstruction of this extraordinary technological treasure in the 1980s was part of a plan to relocate it in pride of place in the then new Powerhouse Museum. A key part of this process – and a "world's first" – was the substantial investment in the creation of a permanent gallery of steam powered exhibits, a facility no doubt developed with many generations of visitors in mind.

It is fitting that the Boulton & Watt engine and its associated exhibitions are located in industrial buildings that owe their existence to the steam power that James Watt harnessed for its limitless applications, not least powering tramways. It would be a great and irretrievable loss to Sydney's heritage to destroy this association.


Rob Renew, President

20 May 2016