

**Supplementary  
Submission  
No 155b**

## **INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES**

**Name:** Mr Lionel Glendenning

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The Hon Robert Borsak MLC  
Committee Chair,  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4,  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Sydney NSW 2000

Upper House Inquiry into museums and galleries No. 4

Submission: Terms of Reference: 1a), 1e), 1f), 1i)

Lionel Glendenning

I am prepared to be a witness in response to this paper and my role in the development of the Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo.

### **Urban design and Architecture**

#### **Synopsis**

- Design of cities in history
- Primary drivers and CORE historical basis for all cities: commerce/culture/settlement/defence
- Sydney's 'raison d'être' requires a cultural iconic set of institutions. Powerhouse as major social collections define Sydney's status as an international and national exemplar
- Urban form derives from cultural artefacts – CORE museums, galleries, auditoria
- Decentralisation as a strategy has failed abysmally throughout the world – a denial of natural formative physical form and content
- Sydney form is radial – simple, direct ie not a matrix - cross city access + movement is poor eg to Parramatta.
- Core and satellite is again 'natural' growth pattern for all major activities – indeed life itself
- Powerhouse Museum is an exemplar in collection, collection management, exhibitions and public programs, heritage, urban design and architecture – award winning.
- Gross dereliction of Parramatta City Council in not fostering over many years heritage and local grass roots evolution of cultural institutions which is now exacerbated by attempts at 'instant cultural transplant' – alien spaceship has landed.
- Governments failure of development planning – 90 storeys and whatever – 'loud-mouth megaphone' developer proponents result in no community consultative program. Rather a cultural ambassador - a small art gallery director has liaised in secret with a few art gallery directors in the area to come up with a hopeless proposal to remove a Sydney core cultural artefact and transplant it - beggar the cost.
- Appalling example of 'asset stripping' of existing Powerhouse Museum heritage site
- Gross underestimation of total costs and risks – (and losses – brand, collection, benefactors, access, audiences – the list goes on.)
- The Powerhouse Museum was 10 years in planning and realisation – Premier has announced 2 - 3 years to opening on a flood prone limited site area, 2 km from nearest trains that will not have volumes, loading built into Ultimo Powerhouse.
- Raw deal for Western Sydney – a giant 'con'; a political stitch-up.

## Urban Design

### Commentary:

From its earliest beginnings in history the city form has been derived from the interaction of commerce (trade/market/port) culture (worship/treasure) settlement (assembly/auditoria/meeting/government) defence (wall/base).

In its development and scale, the economic drivers have interacted to create a dynamic centre and a settled hinterland. From Agora Forum Piazza Square – from New York to Sydney to Chicago to London, the modern city form concentrates the 4 primary components of the city. This diagram of concentric circular form interacts with circulation routes, topography, climate to produce urban form. In Sydney, the urban form is further modified by the coast/harbour/river.

It is a denial of this primary form and radial nature of the desire lines and circulation that the placement of the Powerhouse Museum at Parramatta makes little sense or understanding of the cultural dynamic that drives its central city location. From an historical analysis, it is now perfectly located adjacent to the city core, close to radial circulation with proximity to the economic, commercial, technological, scientific and creative heart of the city.

A move to Parramatta would be a fatal severing of critical and symbolic cultural links that have been established over 135 years from its inception in the Garden Palace - Sydney International Exhibition Building 1879 in the Botanic Gardens, Macquarie Street.

Indeed it was proposed in the 1978 Feasibility Study for the development of the Powerhouse Museum on the Ultimo Power House site that the Decorative Arts collection remain in the Macquarie Street precinct (Treasury Building) as an enduring reminder of its original birthplace (alas Lord McAlpine and the Intercontinental Hotel trumped that proposal and 'mammon' triumphed!)

Sydney has evolved and continues to extend south and north to Wollongong and Newcastle to form a linear coastal city with a radial centre element focussed on the Sydney CBD with sub centres at Newcastle and Wollongong.

Thus major cultural elements should remain located in the central core with satellite 'centres of excellence' in evolving these satellites.

Fine examples of this are the Tate Gallery with its satellites in Liverpool, Margate, St Ives and Bankside; the Imperial War Museum, London with its branches in Manchester and Duxford, Cambridgeshire as well as two in London – Churchill War Rooms and HMS Belfast; the Victoria and Albert Museum which is about to open satellites in Dundee and Stratford, London – the former Olympics site; the Science Museum London with its sister sites at Bradford, York and Manchester; the Royal Armouries which is at the Tower of London, Leeds and Fort Nelson at Fareham, Hampshire; Musee du Louvre with its satellite Louvre-Lens in the region Nord-pas de Calais as well as its international satellite museum Louvre Abu-Dhabi, a collaboration with United Arab Emirates.

Based on history, it would be more logical to move Government to the historic seat of Government in New South Wales at Parramatta.

Given the failure over many years of Parramatta City Council to invest in cultural facilities (ie no Gallery or Museum) as compared with other centres – including Manly, Penrith, Mosman, Blacktown, Sutherland, Blacktown, Hawkesbury, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Liverpool ) why would one move a major city institution 23 km at great cost, rather than establish a facility that grows from

local cultures and communities – one that is more expressive and reflective of their concerns and aspirations. Such an institution can easily draw on the collections of the core institutions.

Driven by megaphone developers, Urban Task Force, Western Sydney Business Council's rhetoric, and the Committee for Sydney (were any heritage houses demolished at Haberfield? Chair Turnbull) trying to correct and rationalise over-development of office spaces, this is a last gasp cultural 'bomb' by the NSW Government – an alien spaceship landing upon a prized site earmarked for (at last) a local initiative by the Parramatta Council to develop for its citizens an entertainment/leisure facility like Darling Harbour's King St Wharf on the flood prone river's edge.

Meanwhile fine heritage buildings at old Liverpool Hospital (the work of convict architect Francis Greenway) and the Female Factory (also Greenway) within the Fleet Street precinct are left to decay for want of imaginative and thoughtful re-use. These buildings and site would be perfect for a multidimensional cultural satellite (a focus for elements of all the state cultural institution), for heritage interpretation and, for contemporary cultural animation involving local arts and community organisations.

The Powerhouse Museum's placement in the 'creative precinct' with UTS, ABC, the design studios of Surry Hills and Chippendale, Pyrmont and Eveleigh communications technology and IT start-ups is unique and synergistic, a critical element in the intellectual infrastructure of Sydney and NSW.

To move from this location will decimate this synergy.

One only has to look at the impacts on Canberra to see what happens when the dead hand of planning fails to understand the forces that define a city.

A lawn cemetery of white cultural buildings stripped from the city core and placed together in the Parliamentary 'green lawn' triangle – a Civic that is far from civic with commercial activity 9 – 5 and then dead after hours – a city that is car-driven with pedestrians wandering marooned in formless open landscapes.

Many attempts at decentralisation/relocation to distant suburbs around a city core in an attempt at a denial of these fundamental design principles are doomed to failure. Certainly one can argue that gravity may not always exist but it is a foolhardy person that steps off a cliff (or relocates a major cultural icon to a distant non-core location) in the expectation that they levitate!

They are on the wrong side of history – taking extreme risks with the cultural investment, dreams, aspirations and achievements of generations of Australians. The Powerhouse relocation would end in tears.

## **Architecture**

### **Commentary:**

The Baird Government proposes destroying the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo on a political whim to satisfy a vocal developer and business lobby who have failed to create a livable city in over developing Parramatta to fill the lack of a locally evolved cultural/arts complex. Ignoring heritage and local culture and demographics, the proposal 'helicopters' in a collection (part thereof) whilst destroying an icon of Sydney's CBD cultural crown in Ultimo.

It appears the original one-line sentence in an Infrastructure NSW report (Nov 2014) has now become a 'vote buying' much needed asset sale 'stripping' of a 100 year old site adjacent the overdeveloped Darling Harbour.

The original Powerhouse Museum collection was acquired from the exhibits in the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879, held in the purpose-built Garden Palace in the Botanic Gardens. Founded in 1880 as the Technological, Industrial and Sanitary Museum, it was established in the Garden Palace after the exhibition closed (as was the Art Gallery of NSW and the Australian Museum). Unfortunately the timber and steel building was destroyed by fire in 1882 and almost all the original collection was destroyed. The collection was quickly rebuilt by the first curator JH Maiden and in 1893 the Museum moved into its purpose built home on Harris Street in Ultimo as the Technological Museum. From 123 years ago to the present day the Museum has been a significant cultural and educational player in a locale modelled on the museum and education precinct of South Kensington, London.

In 1896, the Museum opened its first branch museum in Albury, followed by Bathurst, Goulburn, West Maitland, Newcastle and Broken Hill – each attached to a technical college. Eventually all were closed because of lack of funding during the 1980s.

The Museum had become landlocked with inadequate storage and facilities and small substandard galleries over 3 levels. The expanding University of Technology and large Sydney Technical College were dominating development of the adjacent sites. Since the late 1950s, numerous proposals had investigated a range of sites but none were considered suitable till the old Sydney Market site and the decommissioned Ultimo Power House became available.

The Minister for Public Works, Jack Ferguson commissioned a feasibility study with the MAAS to explore options for development of a museum to rival the Centre Pompidou in Paris. These studies resulted over 10 years later in the Powerhouse Museum in the recycled Ultimo Power House that established a new paradigm for museums in Australia, indeed the world. With the highest museum standards, public access to the collection was vastly enhanced with state of the art exhibits that ranged from Australian goldfields jewellery, musical instruments, decorative and applied arts to giant aircraft and locomotives, steaming engines and industrial heritage icons – the 1785 Boulton and Watt beam engine, the Saturn V rocket engine and the Catalina flying boat.

Extensive Western Sydney and regional exhibition tours and museum partnership programs were a feature of the Museum's activities through the last two decades. However the cumulative effect of efficiency dividends and one off government cuts saw these innovative and valuable NSW wide programs wound down with the loss of key staff.

The Powerhouse Museum became the litmus test for any new museum in Australia and internationally with museum and cultural leaders from the United Kingdom, USSR, China, Europe, Central Asia, Asia and the USA engaging with the Museum through VIP visitors, memoranda of understanding, study programs, staff exchanges, exhibition partnerships and tours and, object loans.

Steve Weil, the leader of the Getty's Museum Management Institute visited several times and described the Powerhouse as 'One of the best museums in the world..... at the forefront- a model for the future.'

Clearly the 'tall poppy' syndrome was in play as subsequent governments emasculated the Museum with supine leadership, massive funding and operating budget cuts, and staff reductions that destroyed morale and curatorial capacity and that has left a general malaise.

The Powerhouse Museum was also a clear resoundingly successful example of heritage renewal to the mindless, lazy development approach which saw demolitions of valuable building fabric and heritage architecture and, which was short sighted, not environmentally sustainable and was destroying the 'collective memories' of the city's citizens.

In effect, the new city form and architecture is appalling. After the huge effort of planning and design at Barangaroo the result is disappointing falling way short of the vibrant hopes of the original competition-winning Thalys entry (delivering a dark formless 'international' veneer of bulky, ugly highrise. Darling Harbour redevelopment emerges as an overweight, obese collage of 'cut-up' architectural magazine clichés re-assembled by a random throw of the dice! The Powerhouse is a beacon in this emerging chaotic over-developed city.

The Powerhouse Museum was designed for a 100 year+ design life with the state of the art engineering systems, heavy floor and roof suspension loadings, vast volumes to intimate exhibition spaces, environmental responses (Harbour heat exchanger as with Sydney Opera House and the AMP), u/v glass and lighting, dust and gas filtration, humidity controls, heights and volumes.

How is it possible that we have reached this cultural nadir where an art gallery director with little knowledge or experience of a major museum like the Powerhouse, can advise a neophyte Premier to, in effect, destroy a 126 year old award winning, internationally recognised museum on a political whim – 'a done deal' in his own words.

The cultural arts community at the highest, most experienced level are as one voice resisting this arbitrary impact on an already impoverished museum and gallery sector.

This impact goes beyond the Powerhouse Museum – a symbol of wanton disregard of experience, knowledge and professional opinion. Needless expenditure on mega cultural projects rather than sustainable, ongoing, long term investment in existing core institutions with a managed evolution of regional centres of excellence (satellites or local government initiatives) is ignored for short term, expensive 'big bang' political vanity projects of messianic premiers supported by faceless political advisors and bureaucrats - minor fellow travellers.

Lionel Glendenning

I am happy for my submission to be published with my name attached.

I am happy to appear as a witness at the Inquiry

**Lionel Glendenning**

## **Brief Resume**

**Lionel Glendenning** AA STC Hons, B,Arch Hons 1 UNSW, M.Arch. Harvard, Dip. Environ St. Macq.

Inaugural Robert Gordon Menzies Scholar, 1968 to Harvard University Graduate School of Design

Life Fellow, Powerhouse Museum

Architect (ret'd), Design tutor: UNSW, Syd U, UTS.

Design Director HBO+EMTB 1988 - 2012

Principal Architect Public Buildings, NSW Government Architect's Office 1984 - 1988

RAIA NSW Merit Awards:

- Claymore Public School
- IMAX Theatre, Darling Harbour
- Bicentennial Park, Homebush Bay;

Architect of Record: Powerhouse Museum

## **Powerhouse Museum Awards: 1988**

Sulman Award for Architectural Merit, Royal Australian Institute of Architects New South Wales

President's Award for Recycled Buildings, Royal Australian Institute of Architects National Awards

Belle Awards for Interiors, Royal Australian Institute of Architects

Meritorious Lighting Award – Institutions, the Illuminating Engineering Society of Australia

Australian Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled Award for Barrier-free Circulation

Winner, Tourist Attractions, Australian Tourism Awards

New South Wales Tourism Award for Excellence, New South Wales Tourism Commission

Best Museum Category A, Westpac Museum of the Year Awards

