

Submission
No 24

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Organisation: The Great Cobar Heritage Centre / Cobar Shire Council
Date received: 3 August 2016

Submission to Upper House Inquiry into NSW museum and galleries.

The Great Cobar Heritage Centre is the Visitor Information Centre and museum for the Cobar Shire. The building and collection are owned by the Shire on behalf of the community. The Shire currently employs staff including tourist officers and a part-time curator to run the Centre. Further funding is accessed through grants and local business support for projects such as conservation work and interpretation. The Great Cobar Heritage Centre benefits from a history of professional curatorship with high standards of research, collection management, exhibition development and maintenance, and community engagement.

The building, completed in 1912, was the administration offices for the Great Cobar Copper Mine. When the mine closed down in 1919, most of the infrastructure was dismantled and removed. The building was saved from demolition by the Mayor of the time, Alderman Patrick Condon. It is therefore not only impressive in appearance and a fine example of the architecture of the time, it is symbolic of the history and endurance of the town. It is located on the site of the Great Cobar Copper Mine, which at its height was the most significant copper mine in the country. The smelting works that were nearby had advanced technology, some of which was invented in Cobar, and some of which was world first in use. The collection and exhibitions interpret the social, pastoral, indigenous and mining history. It includes objects of high significance such as the Royal Far West Baby Health Clinic railway carriage, emblematic of the still operating Far West Health Scheme, which was founded in Cobar. The exhibitions demonstrate the ability to tell a coherent, multi-stranded story, unique to the place but with themes and ideas of broad interest. The exhibitions are a result of close and profound collaboration with a diverse range of community groups, such as the Local Aboriginal Lands Council, pointing to the possibilities of further deep engagement. Many of the exhibitions were first developed through Bicentennial funding in 1988; some smaller grants and contributions from local businesses and companies have allowed some to be reviewed, updated and upgraded, but it has been difficult to find sufficient levels of funding to completely renew some of the older displays and develop new ones.

The Great Cobar Heritage Centre preserves and promotes the history of Cobar and the region. While it is one of the major visitor attractions, it is also a source of recreation, enjoyment and education for Cobar residents. The level of community engagement is very high. The Centre hosts multiple repeat visits from school groups at preschool, primary and secondary levels, and also from a variety of community groups. Considerable effort is put into liaising with the local schools. Teachers consult with the curator and other staff on the educational needs of their students in order to provide curriculum-appropriate materials and resources to enhance their visits. The Centre also collaborates with the Shire library and provides outreach services to groups such as Aged Services.

The Centre is open seven days a week, closing only on Christmas and Boxing Days. It is staffed by skilled and experienced Shire employees, all of whom are knowledgeable not only in visitor operations but also have extensive knowledge of the community. The professionalism, availability and consistency of this visitor information service is the essential cornerstone of the visitor economy in Cobar.

It is vital for the on-going prosperity of the visitor economy in Cobar that at least this minimum level of funding and service continues. It is hoped that in the future more funding could be available to allow both visitor services and museum operations to expand. This would not only benefit the local economy but also provide more opportunities for community involvement and engagement. It also has the potential to contribute significantly to the history of the state and the country as Cobar has been the site of considerable technological and mining development and innovation of national importance.



Kay Stingemore, Curator
The Great Cobar Heritage Centre
Barrier Hwy, Cobar / PO Box 233 NSW 2835
Email: cobarmus@bigpond.com