

**Submission
No 78**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Name: Mr Garry Horvai

Date received: 3 August 2016

Inquiry into museums and galleries

e) the sale of the Powerhouse Museum site in Ultimo and its proposed move to Parramatta, and whether there are alternative strategies to support museum development .

Submission to e)

The Powerhouse Museum precinct has a heritage listed post office and a 120 year old “heritage mentioned” Power Station for Sydney trams converted in 1988 into an award winning bicentennial project museum, funded by tax payers.

Leading up to 2014 the museum suffered poor management decisions and a Government that viewed the museum as hopeless money sink, not worth integrating with the redevelopment plans for Darling Harbour.

In 2014 Rose Hiscock was given the task to revitalise the museum. The drastic changes she and her team were making were in full tilt, when out of the blue the Government announced that the museum will relocate to Parramatta. The move would be taxpayer neutral as the sale to developers would raise between \$150m to \$250m subject to height restrictions. In a bizarre twist shortly after the announcement the development of the Goods Line commenced and by now we have the prospect of the historic Goods Line linking Central Station to a possible 50 storey apartment complex.

It was pointed out to me that moving the Powerhouse to Parramatta was an election promise of the Baird Government and now there is an obligation to go ahead with it. The Premier has promised that the proposed brand new museum on the site of the DJ’s carpark could become Australia’s “answer to the Smithsonian.” Thereby either making an empty promise or ensuring a budget blowout.

The Public debate has been wide ranging and at times acrimonious. A few examples.

SMH 26/02/16 “Museum furore” Parramatta MP Geoff Lee said – “The Powerhouse move to Parramatta should not be hampered by politically-driven elitist attacks”

SMH 22/02/16 – “Powerhouse twaddle” (Patricia Forsythe) – “Two museums would have a significant impact on the bottom line of the museum unless perhaps all of the objectors banded together to become sizable benefactors to the museum year-on-year”

SMH 20-21/16 “Powerhouse Museum riches should be shared around” “It is of course too simplistic to note that a great many on the list – (referring to the open letter by 200 prominent citizens)- live around the inner city in suburbs where home ownership is increasingly out of reach for average income earners”

Apart from the so called elitists, people from the South and Central coasts, school children, visitors from interstate, the country and overseas coming by air or sea, surely as a first choice

would prefer to visit Darling Harbour rather than to travel to Parramatta. Not to mention that the UTS campus is adjacent to the museum.

Unfortunately the decision to decommission the Powerhouse Museum appears to be irreversible. If that is the case I appeal to the enquiry to look at :-

The time line for the whole process. How can the current museum function if the closing date could be 2018 or even 2022 ?

What is the future for items such the priceless 33 tonne (working under steam) Boulton & Watt engine, the Catalina Flying boat hanging from the roof of the boiler room, the Saturn 5 rocket engine on loan from NASA and Loco 1 and its carriages, etc.?
How can the Government guarantee that even a fraction of these capital items will make it to a Vertical Museum in Parramatta that has an unknown target budget ?

As for the historic Powerhouse precinct, are we prepared to see it handed to developers to do as they want ? No doubt they will graciously retain part of the brick wall with a commemorative plaque.

Garry Horvai