

**Submission  
No 65**

## **INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES**

**Name:** Mr Terence Measham

**Date received:** 14 August 2016

---

The Powerhouse Museum collection has been part of the fabric of central Sydney for more than one hundred and thirty years since its foundation at the Great Exhibition of 1879 on the Domain.

When it entered the Ultimo power station in the 1980s, it was an international role model and was soon followed by the Tate in London's east.

Lionel Glendenning's design for the remodelled Powerhouse is an architectural masterpiece whose brilliance has been recognised all over the world. His grand south entrance introduced visitors to one of the most dramatic architectural interiors in Sydney. That awe inspiring experience was eradicated a few years ago by the then management in order for them to receive packaged exhibitions of dubious relevance to the museum's collections. Fortunately, the original entrance can be reconstituted easily at negligible expense.

The collection is one of the greatest in the world and is the result of contributions from several generations of scholars and benefactors. It includes an original score of the Messiah which Handel himself used to conduct. The museum owns a harpsichord contemporary with the young Mozart on which the composer might well have played. The instrument collection is unique in Australia and ranks with the greatest in the world such as the Metropolitan, NY, and the Deutches Museum in Munich. And that's just music, a blend of art and science.

In engineering, the gigantic Whitbread engine is unique in the world and acknowledged by the NSW Auditor General as priceless. It made the ale which 18th century artists such as Gainsborough drank as they painted aristocratic portraits, masterpieces, none of which today are quite as valuable as the Boulton & Watt machine.

The Powerhouse Museum abounds in masterworks and collectibles of the most profound significance in all aspects of its collection (original specimens of penicillin!). Only the Museum of American History, part of the Smithsonian, rivals the Powerhouse in scope and range but is restricted to American material only. By contrast, the Powerhouse Museum situates Australian artefacts within their international context.

The building itself on Harris Street is historically significant and to destroy it would be a very brave act of desecration. To move the Museum out of Sydney would be like moving the Metropolitan Museum out of New York to New Jersey.

Terence Measham, AM, FRSA  
Former Director and CEO, Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences