

**Submission
No 175**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

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The Significance of the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney's Transport, Engineering and Manufacturing Heritage Precinct

Darling Harbour, and surrounding area, is Sydney's most important Transport, Engineering and Manufacturing Heritage Precinct. The former Ultimo Power House, currently preserved as part of the Powerhouse Museum, is critical to this precinct, firstly in its own right as heritage building, secondly an appropriate housing for the collections of large power technology, transport, engineering and manufacturing exhibits as well as an ideal focal point for the surrounding heritage precinct. Once inside the Museum, visitors can appreciate how the transport and engineering themes and exhibits complement the engineering heritage of the buildings that house them. As a focal point for the Darling Harbour area heritage precinct, the Powerhouse provides the heritage narrative for people to get an appreciation of the history before they visit the actual sites marked with interpretation panels.

Prior to the establishment of Darling Harbour as a transport, engineering and manufacturing precinct, Cockle Bay (Darling Harbour from 1826) had an important first people history as well as significance to a number of hungry convicts and then many, "colourful inhabitants".

Cockle Bay (Darling Harbour) was an important maritime transport hub from early settlement around 1800's, generating a rapid growth in agricultural trade, commerce, manufacturing and engineering. The rail history of the Darling Harbour precinct began in 1853 with the purchase of a strip of land by the Sydney Railway Company along what was to become a railway corridor. Reclamation of adjacent mud flats in the 1870s led to extensive railway, wharf and warehouse construction. The Ultimo Power House, opened in 1899, was strategically sited next to the rail corridor for easy access to coal supplies and nearby buildings and structures that depended on electricity, then a revolutionary source of power. The Power House (initially Ultimo Power House) generated the power for the 2nd Pyrmont Bridge (1902), electrically operated swing bridge, the first in the world, an example of the Power House contribution to engineering innovation.

The transport heritage of Sydney was heavily focussed on Darling Harbour with ship, rail, road and tram transport. This transport centre, with the agriculture commerce around Market & Sussex Street, created the environment for the development of engineering and manufacturing enterprises right through to George Street and along Paramatta Street. This precinct is one of significant historical and heritage value and therefore the importance of conservation of infrastructure, buildings such as Sydney Hydraulic Power Pump House, Ultimo Power House & Tram Depot together with the equipment, stories and marked sites cannot be understated. While the information displays are well developed there is potential for additional site panels and electronic information boards that are extensions of the displays, artefacts and stories from the Powerhouse Museum. The existing heritage resources are a valuable and growing local and tourist attraction with enormous potential to grow e.g. UK based Heritage of Industry Ltd, local tour boat operators

As a heritage precinct, the Darling Harbour area has a significant number of wonderful stories to tell about the uniqueness and innovation that drove the development of Sydney. A few examples gives a sense of how important this narrative was, and is, to the city's history and character. To commence with, the rail transport component of the precinct marries nicely with the 1853 Parramatta Street tunnel cut as part of a spur line from the newly completed Sydney Station to Darling Harbour, where a goods yards and dockside rail facilities were being built. This links to Redfern and the 1880s Eveleigh Railway Workshops precinct now the Australian Technology Park and Carriageworks. The tram and early ferry links from Sussex Street centred on King Street was the "Circular Quay" of those days, adjoined by the post office, banks, traders, wholesale and retail business, engineering workshops, hotels, agricultural trading, abattoirs and many more commercial

and industrial sectors. Further up the harbour there were wharves and warehouses side by side with the manufacturing/processing factories, offices and rows of workers' houses. This busy port featured the world's largest iron structure "The Iron Wharf" (until the Eiffel Tower was built). Parts of the Iron Wharf remain today. The railways also built an impressive wharf network to link the 1870s goods yard in Darling Harbour, with the existing shipping and road transport. Parramatta Street from where Cockle Bay crossed George Street to Black Wattle Bay Swamp was sub divided largely for hotels to accommodate the travellers from the west as they rested before the final leg of the journey into Sydney. The remains of the original abattoir at corner of Market and Sussex Street, condemned in 1811, were found in mid 1970s. The world's first export of frozen meat was from Darling Harbour (about where the Chinese Gardens are today) making it possible to preserve it on the long voyage back to the "mother" country.

Sydney's footpaths are dotted with valve covers featuring the inscription "HPCo" [The Hydraulic Power Company], occasionally, a heavy crane can still be seen attached to an early building, such as at the old Bond Store in Hickson Road, Barangaroo. These are remnants of the days when Sydney was powered by high pressure water enabling buildings to go beyond the 1 or 2 floors, dispensing with the individual dirty, steam powered lifts. What remains of the 1890 Hydraulic Power Pump House at 17 Little Pier Street, Haymarket, is now a bar and restaurant but was an important power source in Sydney until shut down in 1976. Examples of whip crane and hoisting crane are in store at Castle Hill.

The Power House (including the Tram Depot, now Harwood Building) and its major engineering and transport exhibits represent a significant part of a complex of heritage structures and features of the Darling Harbour precinct. Collectively, they are a highly significant and irreplaceable collection of engineering heritage assets. These and other assets in the area provide tangible and intangible reminders of Sydney's growth as a city during its industrialisation. The Government's proposed repurposing of the Museum would inevitably lead to a loss of these vital historical and heritage links for the city's residents and also to cultural tourism generally.

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Member of the Engineering Heritage Sydney and Engineering Heritage Australia committee.

- Max conducts heritage and history walks for Engineers Australia from King and Sussex Street to Market Street, through Darling Harbour and across to Fig Street (Fig Street Fiasco and Jack Mundy - 1976) and ending with a visit to Powerhouse Museum.

Construction Engineer on the Darling Harbour Freeway – 1974 to 1979

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