

**Submission
No 18**

**INQUIRY INTO GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF THE
POWERHOUSE MUSEUM AND OTHER MUSEUMS AND
CULTURAL PROJECTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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I am writing this submission as a private citizen of NSW and not as an affiliate of any organisation.

As a museum and heritage conservation practitioner with over forty years' experience, I object in the strongest possible terms to the NSW Government's decision to demolish the heritage-listed 'Willow Grove' and 'St George's Terrace' at Parramatta to make way for the ill-conceived proposal to relocate Sydney's Powerhouse Museum to a flood-prone site on the southern bank of the Parramatta River. I have both personal and professional reasons for opposing the relocation.

I was born in 'Willow Grove' when it was the Aloha Maternity Hospital and I spent the first 28 years of my life living in Hunter Street, Parramatta, next to the historic St John's Anglican Church (now St John's Cathedral). In my youth and in my adult professional life, I have witnessed the destruction of much of Parramatta's built and cultural landscape heritage, including the alienation of large parts of the former Governor's Domain for sectional interests and the demolition or degradation of much of the city's colonial heritage, often for ill-planned and very mediocre new development.

I started my museum career in the Botany Department of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences and went on to become Specialist (Environment & Landscape), Heritage & Conservation Branch, NSW Department of Environment and Planning, then Manager (Policy and Research), Tourism Commission of NSW, Assistant Director (Community Relations), Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, and finally, Acting Director, The Earth Exchange (formerly the Geological and Mining Museum) before going into private practice as a heritage practitioner. It is my understanding that many former staff, including former members of the senior management team of The Powerhouse and many highly regarded museum and architecture professionals here and overseas are similarly opposed to the relocation of The Powerhouse to Parramatta.

A number of major museums overseas have established annexes or satellite museums in other centres, but not at the expense of their much-loved parent institutions. London's Victoria and Albert Museum has an international design centre annexe in Dundee, Scotland. The Louvre in Paris has a branch at Lens in the Nord-Pas de Calais Region of France and a major satellite museum in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The latter museum includes material from thirteen French public cultural institutions. New York's famous Guggenheim Museum, designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright, has its satellite museum, designed by architect Frank Gehry, at Bilbao, in the Basque Region of Spain. London's Tate Museum moved its modern art to Tate Modern in a former power station across the Thames but still in central London, not to somewhere like Heathrow, which would be an equivalent distance from London as Parramatta is from Sydney CBD. They didn't abandon their historic Tate Britain at Millbank near St Paul's Cathedral.

By all means, establish a world-class cultural institution at Parramatta, possibly drawing on the vast and under-displayed collections of The Powerhouse, the Australian Museum, the Art Gallery of NSW and other institutions but don't move The Powerhouse from its Sulman architectural award-winning building in Ultimo where it is a vital part of the State capital's cultural hub. Better still, why not give Parramatta and Sydney's Western Suburbs a museum devoted to their own rich culture, their proud Aboriginal heritage, Their European colonial past and their present multicultural life. There are many redundant Government-owned buildings in the Parramatta North Historic Sites precinct which could be adapted for sympathetic new purposes, including museum uses.

In the aftermath of the recent disastrous bushfires and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic I believe it would not only be financially irresponsible but also immoral for the NSW Government to spend what will be greatly reduced public funds on a project which many in the community believe is driven by the Government's wish to sell off much of the present Powerhouse site for its development potential. Other, equally valid reasons for not moving the Powerhouse are the undeniably huge costs and risks of moving the museum's internationally significant collection, especially the Boulton and Watt steam engine, Locomotive No.1 and rolling stock and the Catalina flying boat.

I urge the Premier, as the current Minister for the Arts, to have the political courage to admit that the relocation of the Powerhouse is a mistake, can no longer be justified on any grounds and to remove it immediately from the Infrastructure NSW COVID-19 recovery program. That program should be focussed on helping those fire, drought and COVID-19 affected communities most in need rather than on trashing a much-loved Sydney institution.

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