

Submission
No 35

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

Organisation: The National Trust of Australia (New South Wales)

Date Received: 1 May 2020

Director
Standing Committee 4: Upper House Inquiry
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

30 April 2020

Dear Director,

Upper House Inquiry – Government management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in NSW

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) makes the following submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into the “Government management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in NSW” in respect to the proposed move of the Powerhouse Museum from Ultimo to Parramatta, and the impact of the relocation on the affected heritage sites.

The National Trust (NSW) has continually stated its position that:

- The Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo should remain open in Ultimo, with its key exhibits remaining;
- Willow Grove and St George’s Terrace should be conserved. A design alternative that retains these heritage places should be selected; and
- Parramatta deserves a new museum that meets the needs and expectations of the people of Parramatta and wider Western Sydney.

Buildings of recognised cultural significance should be conserved. The National Trust have in the past identified and included the following buildings on the National Trust Register:

- St George’s Terrace, Parramatta – 1984
- Willow Grove, Parramatta – 1985
- The Harwood Building (former Ultimo Tramsheds), Ultimo – 1997
- The Ultimo Power House, Ultimo – 2015
- The Ultimo Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo – 2015

Many of these buildings also have statutory recognition and protection as heritage places. Willow Grove and St George’s Terrace are included on the heritage list (Schedule 5) of the *Parramatta Local Environmental Plan 2011* and the Sydney Powerhouse Museum former warehouse buildings,



including interiors are included on the heritage list of the *Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012*. The former Ultimo Post Office is included on the State Heritage Register.

In November 2015, the Trust nominated the Ultimo Power House for inclusion on the State Heritage Register. This nomination was placed on exhibition for public comment by the Heritage Council in March 2020. On 27 March 2020, the Trust nominated the Harwood Building (former Ultimo Tramsheds) for listing on the State Heritage Register.

Affected heritage sites

1. Powerhouse Museum, Ultimo

The cultural value of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo is more than just the buildings, it is also the collection. The two are intrinsically linked by the 1980s development project which repurposed and extended the former power house to be used as a contextual and responsive setting to the Museum of Applied Arts and Science's collection.

The buildings on the Powerhouse Museum site include: the Wran Building, Harwood Building, Switch House, Turbine Hall, Boiler House, Engine Room, Office Building and the former Ultimo Post Office. The key permanent collection items and exhibits are:

- Boulton & Watt beam engine operated by bespoke live steam system from boilers in the Museum's basement
- No 1 Locomotive with tender and first, second and third class carriages
- Strasburg Clock
- Lawrence Hargrave Kite (replica)
- Bell JetRanger helicopter, *Australian Explorer*, VH-DIK flown by Dick Smith on first solo circumnavigation of the world.
- The Steam Revolution: operated by bespoke live steam system from boilers in Museum's basement
- Space: beyond this world
- Transport: lines across Australia.

The role of the museum is defined in the *Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences Act 1945* through the objects and functions of the Trustees which include:

- The display of selected objects arranged to illustrate the industrial advance of civilisation and the development of inventions and manufactures
- The promotion of craftsmanship and artistic taste by illustrating the history and development of the applied arts

The former power house buildings, in and of themselves, are a historical illustration of industrial advance, and were a key component of industrial change in Sydney providing electricity to the tram network, and later contributing electricity to the rail network and the Sydney County Council's grid.

The adaptive reuse of the former Ultimo Power House buildings was an important government initiative linked to the revitalisation of the Ultimo Pyrmont Peninsula, at a time when the traditional industries of the area were waning. The investment in the Museum was considered to be the first step in the evolution of the Ultimo Pyrmont Peninsula from a portside and manufacturing area to a residential and arts precinct on the city fringe.

The Powerhouse Museum, both buildings and collection, are of high heritage value to the people of NSW. The closure of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo and the permanent disbandment of the collection from this site into storage will have a detrimental impact on the Powerhouse site,



erasing a significant layer of history, and taking from the people of NSW a valued cultural institution.

2. Willow Grove and St George's Terrace

Willow Grove is significant as a rare survivor of high Victorian residential development in Parramatta. Built c. late 1880s - early 1890s it is representative example of a Victorian Italianate two storey villa. The building and garden make a strong contribution to the streetscape of Phillip Street, Parramatta. St George's Terrace was constructed in 1881 and is a two storey Victorian terrace consisting of seven houses built to street alignment. It is a rare example of the Victorian terrace type in Parramatta. Together these heritage places are important landmarks of Victorian era development in Parramatta.

The people of Parramatta have conveyed to Parramatta City Council that they want a new museum that expresses the identity of Parramatta and Western Sydney, and that is drawn from the history of the local area. They have also indicated that they:

- Want a cultural hub – with multiple cultural institutions to be in the one place, making them easy to access and enjoy
- Support the Museum of Arts and Applied Sciences coming to Parramatta
- Want Parramatta to fulfil their cultural needs without needing to travel elsewhere
- Believe Parramatta needs a new art gallery and exhibition space
- Want to ensure Parramatta's cultural heritage is a cornerstone of future development¹

Destroying Parramatta's local heritage by demolishing Willow Grove and St George's Terrace is not respecting the history and identity of Parramatta, nor is it facilitating the community want for heritage to be the cornerstone of future development. The authentic character of a place comes with managing change over time. The new responds to and respects the context of the old. Parramatta is a historic place, not a greenfield site.

The Design Guide for Heritage prepared by the NSW Government Architect's Office states:

"Heritage places can tell stories that are relevant and meaningful for diverse groups. They help retain memory, while also creating new stories and identities as communities change."

The people of Parramatta want to celebrate their identity, and they value the stories and places from their past. Keeping Willow Grove, St George's Terrace along with other recognised heritage places in Parramatta will bring meaning to future generations with the stories being about their local area.

The creation of a new iconic museum on the cutting edge of research, science and innovation should not mean that an existing and highly valued institution should close. The Greater Sydney Region Plan is called *A Metropolis of Three Cities*. Growing populations will require more such institutions, not fewer across wider Sydney. The Greater Sydney Region Plan identifies the need for more infrastructure and improved amenity in the Central River City; and improved liveability and sustainability in the Eastern Harbour City.

The 30 minute city promises increased 30-minute access to a metropolitan centre or cluster. These centres are places where people live, learn, work and play. Both Ultimo and Parramatta need cultural institutions to inspire and educate current and future generations, and to act as a catalyst for innovation and employment in their metropolitan centres. These institutions can both be part of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, growing the historic legacy of the Technological Museum.

¹ City of Parramatta (2017), Culture and Our City: A cultural Plan for Parramatta's CBD 2017-2022.



In summary, the Trust is concerned that the proposed closure of the Ultimo Powerhouse Museum and the construction of the new “Powerhouse Museum” at the Phillip Street site in Parramatta will result in the loss of significant heritage places whether by demolition, being the fate of Willow Grove and St George’s Terrace or the loss of highly significant layers of development that will occur at the Powerhouse Museum.

Kind regards,

Andreana Kennedy
Conservation Manager