

**Submission
No 67**

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

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Inquiry into the Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums
and cultural projects in NSW.

Core Vision: The invaluable 'status quo'.

To discuss the impact on delivery of formal and informal educational projects

The disruption to museum object loans, domestic and international

Loss of an integrated cohort of experienced, professional staff and volunteers

Lack of a coherent plan, consultation, due process and financial scrutiny.

Preamble:

Without thought, without consultation, on a politician's whim our lives were changed forever. From researchers, planners, educators and learners, we became protestors and political activists, to preserve a heritage we and previous generations had treasured so long and which will be lost forever, if the move to Parramatta goes ahead.

As an ex primary, public school teacher, mainly in the inner city and south western suburbs of Sydney, I am very familiar with the planning and integration of K-6 units and learning modules, of which excursions are a fundamental part. Visits to the Powerhouse Museum have always been such an exciting and stimulating learning experience. Before the Powerhouse Museum was completed, school excursions went to The Technological Museum, also located in Harris St. Public transport was easy, with only a short walk and teachers were even encouraged to bring in groups of students for study programs after hours. (One such series in which I was involved in the 80s was designed to teach children early computer programming. The museum so centrally located, we were able to bus or train in to start work at 4pm, and parents were designated to do pick ups at 6pm.)

In the last decades, as well as breathtaking exhibits, the Powerhouse Museum has a dedicated education section of teaching and support staff providing tailored programs and materials to enhance the experience and learning program.

Another aspect of Powerhouse excursions which never failed to impress, was the valuable support of experienced volunteers who were an integral part of the process.

Knowledgeable, committed and thoroughly briefed, volunteers worked with small groups, stimulating their interest, helping them and answering their endless questions. Drawn from many professions, including teachers, but also retired museum curators who already had thirty years or so experience of the museum and its collection. They could choose to work behind the scenes, or leading groups of visitors, but were an invaluable resource with little kids. Who will replace them at Parramatta? Or are we asking these valuable 'oldies' to make a third or fourth bus or train change to get into work? Volunteers were very often retired folk who wanted to give back to society and the arts, through a museum they loved. Many of these unpaid support staff have stayed, for decades, some still working into their 90s and providing, knowledge, 'wisdom' and continuity.

They work in the museum itself and supporting Curatorial and Conservation departments in the Harwood Building, now fully refurbished, restored and fit again for purpose.. One has to ask, how much, and why, if it is to be demolished in a couple of years??

The whole site and surrounds are now a joy to visit. The landscaped Goods Line, with gardens, seating and even table tennis, has been developed into a perfect, easy access promenade from Central Station, right down to the entrance to the museum. Buses also stop at the door, and in normal times, taxis are easily hailed.

Affiliated societies were encouraged to be a strong adjunct to the museum, often holding their meetings, seminars and exhibitions on site. The facilities were excellent, and easily accessible for members and speakers. With curatorial support this interaction flourished, and led to additional visiting groups, attending curatorial lectures, exhibitions, and exciting adventures exploring the basement and its treasures, or being welcomed into the Director's office, to discuss, the objects selected from the museum's vast collection and on display there.

Relationships were close. Staff were often members of these groups, attending their meetings, exchanging and disseminating information and giving lectures. There were also outreach programs with regional museums, but also with staff and volunteers visiting Rotary Groups and Care Homes, with stimulating objects and reminiscences of former times. All this in turn led to members of these groups giving back, sharing their expertise which in many cases was ongoing, not only broad, but detailed and expert, lending objects for exhibitions and making donations.

Exhibition catalogues and books on the arts were published in house with expertly produced photographs, and object loans were made to local, regional and international museums. As with building excursions into an ongoing scheme of school units, the loans process was long and meticulous, Could the object be spared? Was it robust enough to make the journey? Were the facilities of the host museum suitable, and their security sound? It had to be prepared, checked for any damage, perhaps needing cleaning or restoration, before it was securely and expertly packed for transportation. On its return the process worked in reverse, being carefully checked for any damage before it was safely repacked for secure storage.

These structures for formal and informal educational support were in place, practiced and generally seamless, as were the object loan procedures, put in place by experienced staff over decades. Even without the impact of the current covid epidemic, the disruption to these vital components of the museums structure would be enormous, and would not only last for at least a decade ,they might never be put in place again, as many, many of the half a million objects would never come together again. They would be dispersed or disposed of. How many are already damaged or broken, having been handled and packed up by the new draft of inexperienced workers, who are not 'Museum People'?

Both staff and public are becoming more disenchanted and fearful of this weird scheme, which is still being nudged forward, still without any coherent plan or PROPER consultation. Without any heed being taken of expert evidence, the findings of the Committee of Inquiry were ignored. How is this possible? Even the 'very large objects' have not been guaranteed a place in the new 'Parramatta Powerhouse' construction, From its inception the project has been dogged by rumours of corruption and fraud and deals being struck between politicians and local developers. Has the question been put to either party?

Now NSW is in crisis, with the twin legacies of bushfires and covid 19, the effects of which will literally devastate the economy and the country. We cannot let ourselves be dragooned into

condoning or allowing such a catastrophic waste of our money. We rely on the re-convened committee under The Hon R Borzak to unearth any secret deals, and prove conclusively that this fundamentally floored project, does not waste any more of our money, nor destroy any more of our national treasures. It's not only about buildings.. It's about PEOPLE, their heritage and their shared history.