

**Submission  
No 71**

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

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17 May, 2020

**To: Legislative Council Select Committee Inquiry into the Government's Management of the Powerhouse Museum**

**From: Ian Stephenson**

I have worked in the museum field in Australia for over thirty years including for Local Government, State Government, not for profits and in the university sector. I have a particular interest in the history and culture of Parramatta and Western Sydney.

My submission is in respect of the following sections of the Terms of Reference:

- 1 (a) (i) The core visions behind the move, and,
- 1 (a) (v) the impact on the heritage items at Willow Grove and the Fleet Street precinct.

While I support the government's initiative to create a major museum in Parramatta I believe that the projects concept is flawed. This is because, to date, the relocation of the MAAS to Parramatta has been based on creating a decontextualized museum, not one which uses Parramatta's unique identity to tell stories of State, National and International interest.

Parramatta is a nationally significant place. Its landscape, buildings, collections and documented history combine in a rich way to tell the stories of its people from ancient times to the present.

It's modern history dates from 1788 (the year the First Fleet reached Sydney Cove) when the British, the first of a long line of immigrants, established a farm and village on Darug land.

Through good fortune the original site of the town, the governor's domain, became a public park, leaving the Darug landscape and its colonial overlays legible despite being in the heart of a modern city. In contrast the 1788 topography of central Sydney was buried by a mountain of masonry long ago.

In its first decade Parramatta was more populous than Sydney. It retained its influential position in the nascent Australia into the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Many of the defining events which shaped the character of our nation including agriculture, education, science and, most importantly the way the first peoples, the Darug interacted with transplanted cultures, not only occurred in Parramatta but have left a tangible record in Parramatta's buildings, landscapes and collections. **The tangible provides a unique springboard for artists, writers, intellectuals and the community to engage with, and celebrate what it means to be Australian.**

The history is rich and surprising. Maria Locke (ca 1805-1878) of the Boorooberongal clan of the Darug people was enrolled at the Parramatta Native Institution in 1814 and used the white-man's knowledge she acquired there to obtain land. At a time when women were denied opportunities for public life Mrs Macquarie shaped the landscape and buildings of the town. One of her guests at Government House observed *Mrs Macquarie would rather be the Governor than the Governor's wife!* Miss Eliza Walsh followed her example and had Governor Macquarie's ruling that single women could not receive land grants overturned. In 1822 astronomer Carl Rumker's work at the Parramatta Observatory proved the calculations for the return of Einke's comet. This was the second periodic comet to be discovered, Halley's being the first. These are but a few examples of the way history and place in Parramatta connect to bigger stories.

While the centre of power shifted east to the port, Parramatta's seminal role in shaping the Australian identity continued to be acknowledged. **For almost a hundred and fifty years its place as the cradle city of Australia has been central to its identity. It is an evolving story which embraces the continuum of change.**

Parramatta's Cultural Plan is the product of extensive consultation with the local community. It identifies clear objectives for Parramatta's cultural development including:

### **Indigenous**

*Our place is deeply significant for Aboriginal people and sits at the heart of cultural and social engagement. Reconciliation is vital to our identity and role as a place of gathering and influence nationally and internationally.*

### **Historic Places**

*Our City is home to historic sites of national and global significance. In the midst of a new contemporary, cosmopolitan City we need to anchor, promote and share this World Heritage for our local and national community. As the first seat of government, our built environment features some of the Australia's most important colonial buildings, peppered throughout our City's changing landscape. More than the architecture, these heritage assets tell a story of the past and help us better understand our future.*

### **An Iconic Museum for our City**

The Parramatta community support the creation of a major museum which will be an integrated element of Parramatta's cultural infrastructure.

**The museum in Parramatta should be a new kind of museum which takes a lead role in creating exhibitions, programs and providing services which use the *extraordinary built, natural and intangible cultural heritage in the City of Parramatta, from the First Peoples to the most recent arrivals to research and share the complex story of power, politics, trauma and transformation which is the city's history. As stated above this is the history of our country in microcosm.***

### **To achieve this the Parramatta museum must:**

1. Facilitate the development of a museum at the internationally significant Female Factory site and Fleet Street precinct in North Parramatta.
2. Conserve the landscape and buildings of the Fleet Street precinct
3. Play a lead role in co-ordinating the existing Parramatta museums as a single aggregated brand to provide a coherent experience, along the lines of Independence National Park in Philadelphia.
4. Provide an ongoing program of exhibitions, events and programmes which interpret the Australia's national stories based on Parramatta exemplars
5. Develop its collections in collaboration with Parramatta's aggregated museum network
6. Have an orientation centre in the Parramatta CBD

The existing science museum in Ultimo which includes a number of very large industrial items, such as the 1785 Boulton and Watt steam engine, should remain intact. The Jones Street building was purpose built to display them, they are not directly pertinent to the Parramatta museum and they would be expensive and difficult to move. However, the marriage of applied arts and science at the Powerhouse has often been problematical and it is arguable that, in the long run, the people of NSW would be better served by the creation of a separate decorative arts museum.

One of the strengths of Parramatta's existing museum networks is early colonial architecture and decorative arts. Moving the decorative arts component of the Powerhouse to Parramatta as a stand-alone specialist museum does have synergies with the city's existing museum network and would be an important addition to the aggregated Parramatta Museum network.

### **Willow Grove and St George's Terrace**

Parramatta's identity is based on its heritage at the same time it is a city of the future. It is the successful layering of the old with new which will help make Parramatta a unique and desirable place. Given both the focus of the museum and the imperative that key pieces of built heritage remain in the city it is essential that Willow Grove and St Georges terrace be retained



Figure 1 Parramatta Lanes Festival at Willow Grove

## Conserving the Landscape

As stated above the survival of indigenous and first contact landscapes close to the heart of the Parramatta CBD is one of the unique cultural assets of the city. The two core landscapes are Parramatta Park and the Fleet Street precinct which adjoins it.

Parramatta Park was created in 1857 when about 100 hectares of the Governor's Domain were reserved as a park. Since then large portions of the park have been alienated, including for a school, an RSL Club and a parking area for the Parramatta Leagues Club. This process continues with the recent rebuilding of the Parramatta Stadium. While the recent transfer of the Wisteria Garden to Parramatta Park is welcome, alienation has not ceased as there are now there are plans to construct a large aquatic centre in the northern section of the park. It would be unthinkable for the Royal Botanical Gardens and Centennial Park in the East to be whittled away for development, yet in the West the alienation of an historic park, which includes a World Heritage site at its core, continues.

Rethinking the Parramatta Museum project as a multi-sited aggregated museum should include compensating for the destruction of significant parts of Parramatta Park by the conservation of the 30 hectares Fleet Street precinct.



Figure 2 the new Bankwest Stadium



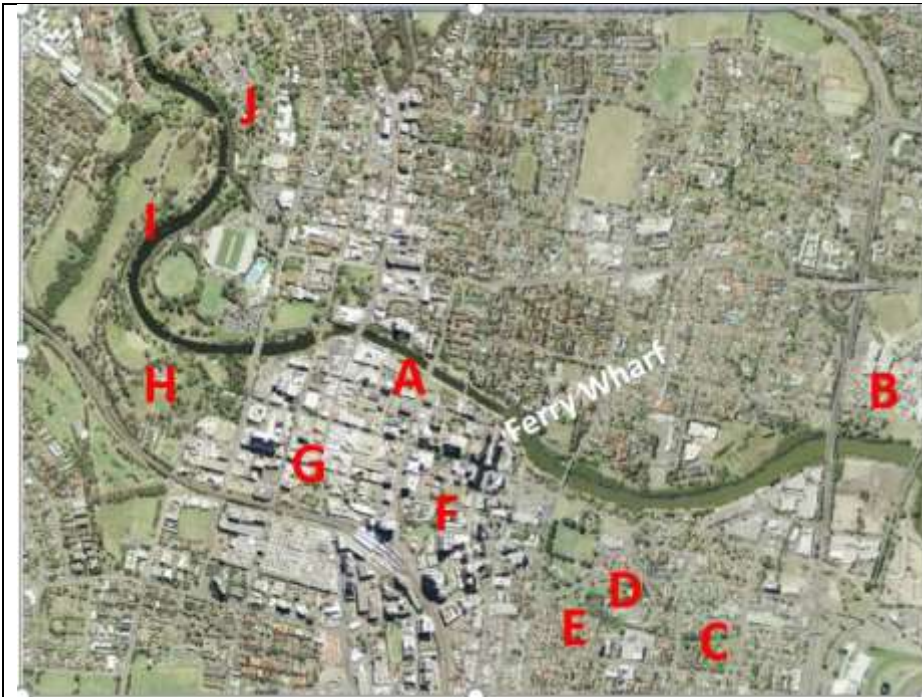
Figure 3 The Aquatic Centre proposed for Parramatta Park



Figure 4 The park like grounds of Fleet Street precinct



## Parramatta's aggregated museum network



- A: Proposed site for the Powerhouse museum
- B: Female Orphan School
- C: Elizabeth Farm
- D: Hambeldon Cottage
- E: Experiment Farm Cottage
- F: Lancer Barracks
- G: St Johns Church
- H: Old Government House
- I: Governor's Dairy
- J: Female Factory Precinct

Figure 5 Parramatta's museum network

Parramatta's museums are located on the eastern and western sides of the CBD, they are linked by the Parramatta River. Foreshore walking paths currently exist between from the Fleet Street precinct to Parramatta Park and Harris Park. An extension to site B, the Female Orphan School at Western Sydney University is proposed. The route of the light rail also will connect the museums and fulfil the need for an east/west transport link through the city.



Figure 6 The route of the Parramatta light rail which is currently under construction

The aggregated museum network is strong on the perimeters of the CBD but weak in the centre. This is problematical in creating a connected museum experience. An orientation centre is needed to explain the various offerings in the aggregated model and improve the linkage between the component museums. It should include exhibitions as tasters and introductions for the distributed network and have access to the parts of the MAAS collection which have direct relevance to Parramatta (refer to Appendix A). From a cultural tourism perspective it would be best located at the ferry wharf because the journey by river from Circular Quay is a heritage tourism experience in its own right however on arrival visitors are confronted by a drab environment which offers kittle encouragement to explore the city and visit its museums.



Figure 7 The Charles St Wharf is an unprepossessing introduction to the city



Figure 8 Augustus Earle, Meeting of the Tribes, 1826 and the same spot today

The 1817 towers of St John's Church [item G in Figure 5] were one of Elizabeth Macquarie's many architectural projects. The juxtaposition of Augustus Earle's 1826 painting of the annual Meeting of the Tribes, highlights the special connections between place, collections, documentation and Australia's social formation – in this case first contact, conflict and displacement.





Figure 9 Rath Yatra Hindu Festival at Old Government House, 2018. Old Government House is the oldest public building in Australia.

Old Government House [item H in figure 5] is Australia's oldest public building and is one of three in the country which date from the 18<sup>th</sup> century – all are located in Parramatta



Figure 10 Elizabeth Farm

Elizabeth Farm [item C in figure 5] is Australia's oldest house.





*Figure 11 Experiment Farm Cottage, image by Sardaka*

Experiment Farm Cottage [item E in figure 5] is the site of Australia's first land grant



*Figure 12 The surviving wings of the 1820 Female Factory*

The Female Factory [item J in figure 5] includes a range of structures from all stages in the history of the women's prison including surviving wings from the first building which was designed by Francis Greenway

NPRAG's (the North Parramatta Residents Action Group) compelling vision for Fleet Street precinct is summarised below.



*Cherished by the traditional owners the Darug, this is where Arthur Phillip camped just 4 months after the first fleet landed in Camp Cove, searching for fertile farms lands to feed the colony. Later over 5000 convict women from the British Isles went through the Parramatta Female Factory. These lands shaped our nation. Tragedy, courage, grief, creativity and triumph over adversity are all abundant here.*

*If sympathetically reinterpreted and re-developed this huge site could become Australia's equivalent of Colonial Williamsburg but with one unique advantage- it is all real, all still there physically and historically and not some modern confection channelling the past. A wonderful, undisturbed happenstance waiting to bloom again as the centre of our early cultures and our manifest evolution into a culturally diverse region and creative city.*

*This is a rare opportunity to create a cultural legacy for future generations which will bring together the celebration of indigenous and colonial history with contemporary creativity for the first time in Australia. A tangible, lasting reflection of reconciliation.*

## **Conclusion**

The large and expensive building proposed for the former David Jones carpark site which involves the destruction of two heritage listed buildings is the wrong solution for the new Parramatta museum. It fails to capitalise on the unique assets of the Fleet Street precinct, and the distributed Parramatta museum network, to use landscape, place, collections and history to tell national stories about Australia's identity.

This new museum needs to be based on six principles:

1. The development of a museum at the internationally significant Female Factory site in the Fleet Street precinct, North Parramatta
2. Conserving the landscape and buildings of the Fleet Street precinct
3. Co-ordinating the existing Parramatta museums into a single aggregated brand to provide a coherent experience, along the lines of Independence National Park in Philadelphia.
4. Providing an ongoing program of exhibitions, events and programmes which interpret the Australia's national stories based on Parramatta exemplars
5. Develop its collections in collaboration with Parramatta's aggregated museum network
6. Having an orientation centre in the Parramatta CBD

It is time to redress the inequities in cultural infrastructure between Sydney's East and West by creating the Museum of NSW in Parramatta as a counterpoint to the Art Gallery of NSW in Sydney.

17 May 2020

**Appendix A**

**A small selection of items from the MAAS collection which have a direct provenance to Parramatta**



Figure 13 Telescope from Governor Brisbane's Observatory, 1820



Figure 14 Wedding dress worn by Ann Marsden at St John's Church Parramatta, 1822



Figure 15 Australian AIDS Memorial Quilt panel in memory of Christian Carrington of Parramatta



Figure 16 First Specimen of Wool produced in Australia, Parramatta, 1804

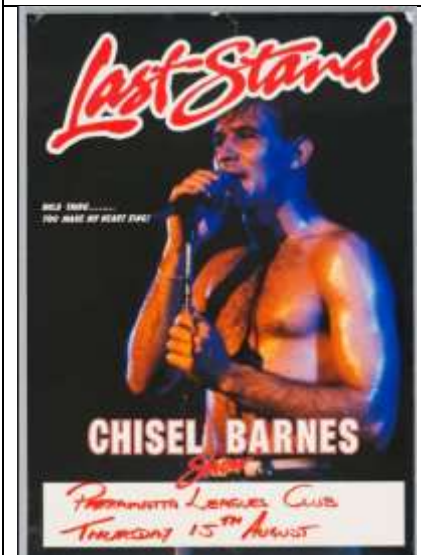


Figure 17 Prototype chalice for St Patrick's Cathedral Parramatta by Hendrik Foster, ca 2000



Figure 18 Wunderlich architectural decoration from a Parramatta building, c. 1930



Figure 19 Egg incubator manufactured in Parramatta in the 1930s



Figure 20 Lachlan Macquarie's Gothic armchair



Figure 21 Candlestick commemorating the turning of the first sod of the Parramatta to Bulkhams Hills railway, 1901