

**Submission  
No 73**

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

**Name:** Ms Julie Owens MP

**Date Received:** 16 May 2020

---

# Julie Owens MP

Your local Federal Member for Parramatta



16 May 2020

## Submission re Powerhouse Museum Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the *Inquiry into the Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales*. I am Julie Owens MP, Federal Member for Parramatta; a position I have held for 16 years.

Parramatta is an extraordinary place. Rich in indigenous and European Colonial history, Parramatta embodies the migration story of our state and nation. Established along the banks of the Parramatta River there is little wonder why it has been such a popular meeting place for thousands of years.

Regardless of the significance of this place, the NSW Government seems intent on destroying what is left of our heritage in Parramatta since they came to office in 2011. First was the loss of our War Memorial Pool then 20 hectares of National Heritage Listed Parramatta Park was hived off for a new pool and other developments yet to be revealed.

Construction of the Parramatta Light Rail will see the Royal Oak Hotel (1813) demolished. In addition, the Light Rail project boundary encroaches on the curtilage of the National Heritage Listed Parramatta Female Factory. This is extraordinary given the long-running community campaign for World Heritage Listing of the Parramatta Female Factory. Now the same State Government intends to knock down Willow Grove and St George's Terrace.

The crux of this whole issue is quite simple; why was this site selected for the Powerhouse Museum, and by whom, knowing full well that it is the location of two significant heritage listed items?



**Electorate Office:** 1/25 Smith Street, Parramatta 2150 (entry on Macquarie Street)  
**Mail:** PO Box 395, Parramatta NSW 2124 **Phone:** 9689 1455 ■ **Fax:** 9689 3813  
**Email:** [julie.owens.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:julie.owens.mp@aph.gov.au) ■ [www.julieowens.com.au](http://www.julieowens.com.au)

Initially the community believed that these buildings would be incorporated into the new Powerhouse but as more questions were asked about the project it became very apparent that the State Government's intentions for Willow Grove and St George's Terrace did not match the expectations of the community. I have received hundreds of emails from local residents completely opposed to the demolition of these heritage buildings. A petition circulated by the North Parramatta Residents Action Group opposing the demolition of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace attracted more than 13,000 signatures within 7 days of the announcement.

To say the community is livid is putting it mildly.

I am sure that other submissions have highlighted the aesthetic and architectural significance of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace and a lot of the correspondence I received from the community also focused on these aspects. However, the community also expressed strong views about the social significance of Willow Grove and the role both buildings play in delivering a sense of place to Parramatta.

Built in the 1890s as a residential home, Willow Grove was transformed into a private hospital from 1920 until the 1950s. It is during this period that Willow Grove contributed so much to our social history as a maternity hospital. Originally operating as "Estella Private Hospital" it underwent a name change to "Westcourt" and then in 1925 to "Aloha".

Estella Private Hospital (Willow Grove) was one of many private "lying-in" (maternity) hospitals operating in Sydney in 1920. Women travelled there from surrounding districts to give birth. Robert Power writes *"The place was definitely operating as a private hospital in 1919 as my mother's youngest brother was born there on 8 September, 1919. His birth certificate provides a description of the place as Nurse Davidson's Private Hospital, Phillip Street, Parramatta."* Barbara Muir (nee Lester) commented *"I was born at "Aloha" 22/11/1934. In attendance was Doctor Whiting and Nurse McLachlan. Being November my late mother always referred to the beautiful Jacarandas outside her window. In fact I was very nearly named "Jacaranda"!!"*<sup>1</sup>

Willow Grove played an important part in the course of Parramatta's medical history. In fact, Parramatta has been at the centre of the evolution of Australian medicine from colonial to modern times. Australia's first women's hospital was built by Sir Francis Greenway and formed part of the Parramatta Female Factory until its transformation in c.1850 to the Parramatta

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Estella' Private Hospital, Parramatta 1920 -1953, Tsang A, *Parramatta Heritage Centre*, 29 November 2013 (updated 2017), viewed 15 May 2020.

Lunatic Asylum, Macquarie Barracks, Brislington Medical and Nursing Museum, Parramatta District Hospital, Cumberland Hospital, the Children's Medical Research Institute, Westmead Hospital and Children's Hospital at Westmead are all institutions that have contributed to putting Parramatta at the centre of health service delivery and medical research in NSW for over 200 years. The significant role Willow Grove played, operating as a private hospital for over three decades, must not be dismissed.

In my Electorate Office there is a framed print featuring 30 Parramatta shops, churches and institutions that lined the streets of Parramatta at the turn of the Twentieth Century. Less than a handful are still standing. Similarly if you walk the streets of Parramatta today demolition and construction is happening at break neck speed. It is exciting to see Parramatta grow but we must also ensure we respect our past in the process.

Together Willow Grove and St George's Terrace make a significant contribution to the streetscape of Phillip Street. They set the tone in an area that is rapidly being modernised and transformed. The two buildings frame the corner and Willow Grove provides a delightful vista from Horwood Place. The setback garden adds to the attractiveness of this handsome Victorian Italianate residence, the only one of its era still remaining in the Parramatta CBD core. Often referred to as that "lovely house with the roses", many admire it from afar and consider it a mainstay of the Parramatta heritage experience. Now all of this is in serious risk.

As the Federal Member for Parramatta I take my role as a representative of this city very seriously. I know that I have a responsibility to do all I can to ensure those who have come before are respected. I include the preservation of built heritage to be of the highest priority. It is a gift that can never be replaced. We must treasure our heritage and ensure that it remains for future generations to enjoy as much as we do.

**Julie Owens MP**

**Federal Member for Parramatta**

Authorised by Julie Owens MP, ALP, 1/25 Smith St, Parramatta