

Submission  
No 76

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

**Organisation:** heritage solutions

**Date Received:** 18 May 2020

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**The Hon Robert Borsak MLC****18 May 2020****Chair: Select Committee on the Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in NSW**

Dear Robert,

From the Terms of Reference I address in particular, 1 (a) the proposed move of MAAS from Ultimo to Parramatta & (v) the impact on the heritage status of the site in Ultimo and the heritage items including Willow Grove and the Fleet Street precinct.

The key values of the site in Ultimo in deciding its future are:

1. the original power station of rare fabric as evidence of the 19thC industrial history of the City, now a fragment in a substantially modern context;
2. the precinct had a key role in the transport history of the City;
3. it forms an anchor for Ultimo's key place in the identity in the City, of inestimable value in historical, heritage, cultural, social, and economic terms. Most of that industrial history has vanished;
4. the 1988 transformation into the Museum. It is the finest building and adaptive re-use from the Bicentennial year evidenced by the Sulman Award. It now one of the few survivors given the substantial losses in Pymont Ultimo. (Sadly real estate and short term economic benefit usually often social value);
5. the whole should be State Significant in heritage terms;
6. the complex is also a major cultural asset to the City as a whole. The sum is much more important than the parts;
7. its accessibility to the City, State and nation, given its central location and connections to road, rail, tram, and pedestrians, for visitation and tourism;
8. the research value of its fabric and collections. The Parramatta proposal is half the size. Given that 98% of the PHM's collections are in storage this is alarming and;
9. while Parramatta embodies some of earliest settlement history, it is now a major hub for the multi-cultural modern city with its cultural and social diversity. It is largely a modern migration story, very different to what Pymont Ultimo and the PHM represents.

Successful museums are rooted in a particular history and culture of the place they are located. Move and a great deal of their value will be destroyed. The Powerhouse grew out of a 137year old institution, the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences, building on a vast history of its place in Sydney, the Haymarket, and industrial and maritime history of Darling Harbour. Parramatta has a different and valuable history to be celebrated in its own terms. To move the Powerhouse Collection is to substantially destroy its relevance.

The MAAS is an accretion of gifting and contributions by thousands of people to that institution. Are you going to ask all those thousands if they wish to re-assign their gift to a different institution in Parramatta? To continue to use the term Powerhouse is a nonsense, pure spin. It does not belong to your Government; it is massive theft to do this without community support. And the people of Parramatta have spoken also. They do not want a second hand product, they want an institution rooted in their history, that speaks to them.

### **Rights of donors, and the public interest?**

The current museum and collection is an accretion of public patronage over its 137 year history. What rights to the donors and audience for the facility have?

### **A Cameo point:**

We own some rare and valuable posters, classics from the 1920's period by Andre Cassandre – they appear in all of the books on posters of that period. There are probably no others originals in Australia. We have willed these to the Powerhouse. They belong in a national institution either in Sydney or Canberra; not buried because of irrelevance, in storage in Parramatta. If the Powerhouse goes, we will re-assign the gift.

We also had friend, the late Werner Adamek, who gave his magnificent collection of Navaho rugs to the Powerhouse some decades ago. To our knowledge they have not been displayed and they evidently have no place in the proposed Museum. What will be their fate? The collection should be re-assigned with consultation with his executors. I can facilitate this.

To quote one of our wiser heads on cultural conservation, Kylie Winkworth:

*'The Powerhouse Museum is not a box of toys to be sent to a place of greater political opportunity. Nor does Parramatta need the planes, trains and automobiles from Ultimo in order to build a new museum for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Powerhouse Museum belongs to the people of NSW, not the government of the day. We the people have endowed the museum through our taxes and generosity as donors to the collection. The museum is our legacy, the gift from previous generations to the present and the future. The Powerhouse Museum's collections are held in trust for the people of NSW. They are not the tradable assets and political pawns of government. Museums are built on foundations of public trust and the confidence of generations of donors and benefactors. That is what is betrayed by the Berejiklian Government's reckless museum demolition plan. This government has no license to sell a well-loved cultural institution and fill the site with high rise apartments. Vacuous words about a remnant cultural space do not disguise the government's uncivilised intent to destroy the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo.'*

Parramatta represents an opportunity to celebrate the diversity of western Sydney in particular, the successful migration story. The PHM represents an earlier history rooted in the industrial and transport history. Both stories are important to our city; best told separately.

## Recommendations

1. The PHM should be state heritage listed
2. The PHM should stay intact on its suite in Ultimo
3. Parramatta should have a new museum in the Cumberland Hospital precinct which is clearly what the community wants
4. Willow Grove and St George's Terrace are highly valued by the Parramatta community and should be saved from demolition

The current travails and the economic constraints of this time, gives us time to pause and re-think. Parramatta deserves a very different museum, not a much-diminished Powerhouse.