

From Save the Powerhouse Facebook page:

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28 August, 2019:

“HERITAGE VALUES” DEPEND ON WHERE YOU LIVE!

The Victorian Government has consistently respected Melbourne’s significant buildings and museums - its museums program is actively expanding - as fundamental to building the city’s brand and tourism trade.. A recent example is heritage listing for Federation Square <https://www.abc.net.au/.../federation-square-receive.../11451664>, which was completed in 2002 and is now recognised for its historical, aesthetic, technological and social values. The listing followed strong community opposition to commercial development on the site.

Contrast this with Sydney, where the nomination of the Powerhouse Museum with the Heritage Council for state heritage listing has gone precisely nowhere after four years.

“Yet over the same period”, observes museums and heritage consultant Kylie Winkworth, the Berejiklian government has “ruthlessly pursued its...plan to close the Powerhouse and turn the museum site over to property developers, despite (similar) sustained community opposition”.

Further, only this week in her development zeal, the Premier demonstrated her determination to impose a 237 m hotel/residential tower on low-rise Pyrmont by instructing the Greater Sydney Commission to immediately review the planning controls for this area – presumably to ensure a smooth passage for the Star Casino Tower’s development approval. “Pyrmont is open for business” Gladys crowed, “ready to be taken to the next level.”

“But the development bonanza is certain to extend to the Powerhouse Museum” Winkworth warns.

“The secret business case papers revealed plans for four tower blocks on the Powerhouse site, including two 68 storey super towers. Lionel Glendening’s award- winning Wran building is in the way, so that will be demolished for a super tower...Property development trumps social and cultural values in Sydney any day of the week.”

“One premier is listening to the community” she concludes. “The other premier is listening to radio shock-jocks! One city is building its brand around culture and the protection of heritage, museums and public places. The other city is building a reputation for museum demolition, selling heritage buildings, casinos on steroids, shonky tower blocks and dodgy development. Which one is the REAL global city?”

With thanks to Kylie Winkworth PMA.

26 August:

MAAS EXODUS...”AND THEN THERE WAS...ONE?*

This month’s unexplained exit by Craig Limkin, Executive Director of Create Infrastructure, is just the latest in a series of departures of senior officials associated with the nefarious “Powerhouse move” project.

The massive haemorrhage of talent and expertise appears to have been triggered by former Powerhouse director Rose Hiscock.

Appointed in 2013, a year later she released the board’s well-received “2020 strategic plan”, with the (then) president of the board of trustees, Professor John Shine.

“The museum’s location in Ultimo was central to their vision” (SMH November 13, 2015). “The board said that [MAAS’] future was intertwined with plans for Darling Harbour...[which] will enliven our city.”

When (former) premier Baird announced the shock Powerhouse move to Parramatta, Hiscock initially opposed him - “You can’t just pick up a museum and move it” - then resigned.

As museums expert Kylie Winkworth commented “It’s very unusual for a director [to] leave after just two years”. And it seems to have been the beginning of the end.

Her successor, the controversial Dolla Merrillees, did not last long. Her head rolled – it’s presumed -

owing to her mismanagement of the calamitous “fundraising Fashion Ball” in February 2018 which resulted in a \$215,210 loss.

Yet when the diligent Parliamentary Inquiry sought her later for further questioning she “could not be found” even though she was, in fact, contactable, and working at the Western Sydney University for the MAAS Board President, Barney Glover.

In November 2018 she was replaced by commercially successful businesswoman Lisa Havilah while senior MAAS staffers were steadily vanishing.

As Winkworth noted “Of the people listed as principal officers in the last annual report only one is still there, (Corporate Resources and Chief Financial Officer) Andrew Elliott”.

Development and External Affairs Directors Leann Meiers, Rebekah Waite and Arani Duggan resigned in mid-2018.

Respected Collections and Exhibitions Director Peter Denham, Programs Director Tristan Sharp, and Parramatta Project Director Michael Parry followed this year.

Now, Craig Limkin. None of these departures has ever been explained, or justified and they don’t reflect favourably on MAAS as a congenial working environment. Did they all jump or were they “encouraged” to resign once they were no longer considered useful? We will never know, but can reasonably assume that as soon as he reaches his “use by date”, Andrew Elliott’s career with MAAS will be over too!

*And then there was...one? Apologies to Agatha Christie.

17 August, 2019

IGNORANCE & GREED UNDERPIN ALL GOVT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

The ongoing Upper House debate on the final report from the 2½ year Inquiry into Museums and Galleries has already achieved two valuable purposes. Not only has it rekindled vigorous public interest in the contentious “Powerhouse move” issue, but has also highlighted the fact that the Government’s entire infrastructure policy is driven by just two forces: ignorance and greed, which feed on each other.

Wherever you look, whatever the project, the story is the same. It seems that a “developer mate” has only to murmur “more big bucks” and the Government races away like a pack of frenzied hounds sighting a hare.

Even though expert analysis and feasibility studies for each new project are clearly essential, the lure of the dollar prevails, invariably resulting in disaster - budget chaos, lengthy delays and huge budget blowouts whether it’s WestConnex, the Light Rail, the Sydney Metro, Sydney Football Stadium or ambitious ventures in Sydney’s troubled arts sector.

More recently noisy clashes with former “best friends” like LendLease, initially selected to develop the new stadium and Sydney Modern, or the Light Rail builder Acciona Infrastructure, with whom, Wikipedia says, “the relationship has deteriorated” following massive delays and finance disputes. In the Upper House debate last week, speakers’ comments specifically illustrated the “greed and ignorance” syndrome.

Vice Chair of the “Museums and Galleries” Inquiry committee David Shoebridge observed that “The real return for the people of New South Wales (of the Powerhouse move proposal) is two big property developments delivered by the Berejiklian Government...(this) is about...getting two property deals for one...It (will) move the...Museum from Ultimo so that a multi-storey tower can be built on the publicly owned site...(while in Parramatta), “the main thing we will see on the site is a 70-storey residential block the size of the Meriton development next door!”

Fellow Inquiry committee member Walt Secord, Shadow Arts Minister, highlighted the uncontrolled budget blowouts across the arts sector “The arts have lurched from crisis to crisis under this Government. The problem of the Powerhouse Museum is creeping into other projects. We are looking at funding for arts and infrastructure projects in New South Wales that is costing upwards of \$2 billion...the Government claims the Sydney Modern Project at Art Gallery NSW will cost \$344 million, but the Opposition has been advised that it is heading towards \$600 million.”

Secord also told SMH earlier that “there are major concerns in the arts community about the lack of transparency surrounding the actual cost of the Sydney Modern project.”

In the debate he continued “also the Walsh Bay Arts Precinct...has jumped from \$129 million to at least \$245 million.”

And on 14 August SMH <http://tiny.cc/cthbzb> reported that “the Walsh Bay arts precinct revamp” has stalled, with the result that “The Australian Chamber Orchestra, Bell Shakespeare Company and the Australian Theatre for Young People are in limbo after work on their new lodgings at Walsh Bay's Pier 2/3 has failed to go ahead”.

Funding for the fit-out of Walsh Bay's Pier 2/3, a key part of the state government's much-vaunted Walsh Bay Arts Precinct, is also being questioned.”

Secord concluded “We also see that the Australian Museum will be closed for a year and the renovations will cost \$50 million”

A personal note, here: one of the Government’s “justifications” for these renovations, is that the temporary exhibition space must be enlarged to accommodate the prestigious Tutankhamun” Exhibition, scheduled to come to Sydney in 2021 for six months.

We visited the exhibition personally a few weeks ago in Paris, and can confirm that it is genuinely impressive, and beautifully presented BUT it is NOT ENORMOUS. It could comfortably have been hosted in the Powerhouse Museum’s temporary exhibition space, or the new Darling Harbour Exhibition Centre, where it would have been centrally located for easy access by tourists and locals, while sparing taxpayers the unnecessary \$50 million bill, the closure of a popular museum for a year and exiling the much admired Pacific Collections to storage!

Yet again the Government has not done its homework (ignorance) but has swallowed flawed advice (greed) that the renovations will somehow generate vast extra profits!

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