

Dear Heritage Council

24 March 2020

Re: Advertised Notice of Intention to consider listing of the shell of the former Ultimo Tramways Power House on the State Heritage Register

The Rail, Tram Bus Union Retired Members Association objects to the nomination in its current form.

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union, NSW Branch, Retired Members Association represents retired workers from the rail, tram and bus industries. We have been active in preserving the social and industrial history of NSW.

The RTBU was formed in 1993 through the amalgamation of the former Australian Railway Union, Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginememen, The Australian Tramway and Motor Omnibus Employees Association and the National Union of Railwayworkers. The Unions and their members have had a long association with the rail and tram industries in the Pymont and Ultimo neighbourhoods since the late 1800s.

The Association is most concerned that the Councils proposed listing of the former Ultimo Tramways PowerHouse (the Power House was for many decades referred to as the Ultimo Power House and Tram Car Depot as it was an integrated transport undertaking in which the railway commission was the owner of the power station, the transporter of coal to the power station, and the operator of the tram depot) fails comprehensively to include the role place plays now as the Powerhouse Museum.

The development of the Powerhouse Museum, now 140 years old was enabled by the 1977 heritage legislation which created one of the world's great museums with a central focus on transport and engineering. The museum provides a linear connectivity between transport and engineering innovation and excellence represented by the rail, power and tram industries which provided the infrastructure backbone for the development of industrial Sydney.

By 1900 Pymont and Ultimo was an industrial precinct with the Darling Harbour Goods Yard, (the jewel of the NSW railways, and the destination for much of NSW agricultural wealth to be exported), with dozens of wool stores, power stations and mills which provided thousands of jobs for local residents. The railways connected Ultimo and Pymont to the port and electric trams took workers to their jobs.

The Museum congeals the history of the development of industrial Sydney. The public sector was at the forefront of innovation. The Ultimo powerhouse was a pioneer of technological innovation being the first power station in NSW to use steam turbines and the first to use pulverised coal fired turbines. The Ultimo Power House powered the Sydney electric tramway system which was to become the second largest in the British Empire. They were responsible for a significant reduction in Sydney's pollution. They were powerful exemplars of modernity.

The Museum provides a conduit to reveal the connection between space and place and NSW industrial heritage. The industrial activity of the Pymont/ Ultimo precinct for almost a century parallels the technology hubs and arts and cultural precincts being developed now in Sydney. All are products of their eras. The Museum for over 40 years has provided an organic link to Sydney's industrial history.

The sinews of industrial society depended on the labours of working people. The Museum, its location and surrounds provide a direct link to the struggles of working people and their organisations, the trade unions. There are many examples of the strikes and struggles of workers in the Ultimo/Pymont precinct to improve wages and conditions and workers' rights.

The Darling Harbour Railway Goods yard was a centre of many industrial campaigns, as were wool stores, wharves, the CSR sugar mill, the Power Station and Ultimo Tram Depot, one of eight significant Sydney tram depots.

The development of unionism in NSW owes much to the precinct. For example, a predecessor union to the RTBU, The Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Servants, opened a sub branch in Darling Harbour Goods Yard in 1909 because they had the reputation for having amongst the worst conditions in the NSW railways. In 1913 500 workers walked off the job, the first major industrial action in the NSW railways. Subsequent events allied to the strike led to the deregistration of the Union.

As unionists the importance of place in presenting and interpreting our history is incalculable. Industrial heritage sites represent the sweat and tears of past generations of working people. They are the places which forged the symbiotic relationship between workers, machinery and their skills and the emergence of industrial capitalism in Australia. The Sydney Technical Institute was relocated to Ultimo in 1880 and in 1909 the first electrical apprenticeships were established in NSW because of the presence of the nearby Ultimo Power Station.

As an Association which represents workers in the rail and tramway industries, which historically have been integrated with their power supply, the Museum is the embodiment of the development of the transport and engineering industries in Australia. It has no peer. These industries form the DNA of the Museum and the precinct from which they evolved.

The industrial era heritage architecture of the museum, with its soaring and cavernous spaces provides a unique environment for the current display and cannot be replicated. The engineering and transport achievements of Sydney's industrial age will have their meaning significantly devalued if separated from place. They are crucial links in our cultural, industrial and labour heritage and provide a road map for current and future generations understanding their past and as an evolving journey to our collective future.

The Association strongly argues the nomination on exhibition is alarmingly incomplete and should be rejected. We believe the Powerhouse Museum in its totality should be listed on the state heritage register. The listing must include the transport and engineering displays which must not be uncoupled from the heritage building. As a representative of rail and tram workers the Association argues the Museum and its collections are an irreplaceable embodiment of the working lives of rail and tram workers.

Yours faithfully,

Roger Jowett (For and on behalf of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, Retired Members Association.)

Unit 39, 10-14 Terry Road, Dulwich Hill, 2203; M0432105509

(The submitter was the National Secretary of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union from 1993 to 2005)