

The International Committee on the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage



The Chair
Heritage Council of NSW
Locked Bag 5020
PARRAMATTA NSW 2124
heritagemailbox@environment.nsw.gov.au

23rd March 2020

Dear Heritage Council Chair,

Notice of Intention to consider listing on the State Heritage Register of Ultimo Tramways Power House, 500 Harris Street, Ultimo, 2007

I write today as the President of The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH), the primary international organisation concerned with industrial heritage. TICCIH is an international community of heritage professionals whose purpose includes advocating for industrial heritage by promoting its preservation, conservation, investigation, documentation, research and interpretation across the world. We are an organisation of members who include historians, conservators, museum curators, researchers, students, teachers, heritage professionals and anyone with an interest in the development of industry and industrial society and its preservation. Internationally TICCIH works with ICOMOS and in Australia there is a joint ICOMOS/TICCIH National Scientific Committee.

TICCIH has an interest in the Ultimo Powerhouse not only because of its significance to its Australian members, especially in New South Wales, but also globally because the Museum building contains an internationally recognised Boulton and Watt steam engine. With the proposed nomination of the Ultimo Tramways Power House TICCIH has taken the opportunity to comment on the proposed nomination which, generally, we support.

TICCIH has made specific comments on the nomination and the way it addresses the NSW Heritage Criterion. The seven criteria upon which the significance assessment is based are outlined below

- Criterion (a) an item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history;
- Criterion (b) an item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history;
- Criterion (c) an item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW;
- Criterion (d) an item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- Criterion (e) an item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history;
- Criterion (f) an item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history; and

- Criterion (g) an item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's cultural or natural places or cultural or natural environments.

Heritage Significance Assessment

The discussion of the heritage significance is based on the Draft Listing Document. We have examined each of the NSW Heritage criterion regarding the history and physical evidence of the study area based on existing reports¹ and our members' direct knowledge provided to the TICCIH committee.

Criterion A

An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history.

"Ultimo Tramways Power House most likely meets this criterion of State significance because it was the first large state-owned electricity generating station in NSW and the original generating station for the supply of electricity to power the electric tramway network throughout Sydney".

TICCIH agrees with this assessment of historical significance which is well-documented and understood in the previous historical studies on the site. We note that the electrification of the Sydney tram network was an important technological innovation (occurring in parallel with that in Melbourne) and the reason for the Power Houses construction. It was a large engineering project and the report *Industrial Heritage of Power Generation in Australia* suggests that at the time of its construction and for some years after it was one of the largest plants in Australia.²

We would also make the point that at this time electricity was an emerging technology both in its transport uses and also domestically and in its generation. As the report by Godden et al makes clear³ some design decisions were made which reflect the lack of experience with this technology. We suggest that the Powerhouse may well be of significance as a site of technological transfer and innovation for electricity generation in NSW and possibly in Australia.

TICCIH also notes that the adaptive reuse of the Powerhouse as a Museum was an important early heritage conservation activity following on from the Green Bans of the 1970s. Adaptive reuse is an important conservation activity and the adaptive reuse of the Powerhouse is an early example of this practice in Australia and was followed by examples such as the Spotswood Sewerage Pumping Station and the Malthouse Theatre, both influenced by the Powerhouse. This aspect of the site's

¹ Architectural Projects. Conservation Plan for the Powerhouse Museum, Report by Architectural Projects prepared for The Powerhouse Museum Surry Hills. (2003).

Godden Don, Edward Higgenbotham, E. Pinder, Warren Whittaker, and R. Young. The Ultimo Power House. History and Technology. A report for the Government Architects Branch, Public Works Department of New South Wales. (1984.) (note two versions of this plan were reviewed).

N.S.W Public Works Department. Powerhouse Museum Conservation Plan. Prepared by Government Architects Branch, Public Buildings Section (1983).

Tony, Brassil. Tramways Workshops, Depots and Substations: Survey and Assessment. Final report by Godden Mackay Logan for the National Trust of Australia (NSW) (1994).

² Godden Mackay. Industrial Heritage of Power Generation: A Framework for Heritage Management: Volume 2. Report prepared for the Electricity Supply Association of Australia (Australian Electricity Supply Industry Research Board) by Godden Mackay (Surry Hills, NSW: 1995).

³ Godden Don, Edward Higgenbotham, E. Pinder, Warren Whittaker, and R. Young. The Ultimo Power House. History and Technology. A report for the Government Architects Branch, Public Works Department of New South Wales. (1984.)

The International Committee on the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage



history is not discussed in the nomination but TICCIH is of the view that if researched it is likely that the Powerhouse will meet Criterion A for this aspect of its history as well.

Criterion B

An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history.

TICCIH is concerned that this criterion has not been explored. There would be a clear case for consideration of whether the Powerhouse has strong or special associations with the engineers involved in the design of the building.

If one considers those who were involved in the adaptive reuse of the Powerhouse to the Museum and in the Museum's early years, it is a veritable rollcall of individuals who had important careers in Museums or as Heritage Consultants. TICCIH considers that this aspect of the Powerhouse role in developing conservation practice and museology in key practitioners needs to be assessed and fully appreciated which we believe will demonstrate special associations between those individuals and the Powerhouse .

Criterion C

An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW;

The provisional assessment states "Ultimo Tramways Power House most likely meets this criterion of State significance because the power station buildings are a landmark group of buildings which relate closely to the visual and architectural industrial context of the area. The Boiler House building was, in its day, one of the largest brickwork structures in the state and the chimneys were significant Sydney landmarks for seventy years."

TICCIH notes that the response to this criterion is only focused on the aesthetic characteristics of the place. The question of the award-winning additional wing which was part of the adaptive reuse of the Powerhouse into a Museum should be discussed as obviously a project that was the Winner of the AIA National President's Award for Recycled Buildings, the NSW AIA Chapter Belle Interiors Award for Interior Design and a finalist for the National Sir Zelman Cowen Award would surely have some creditable aesthetic characteristics at a State level.

Furthermore, we note that there is no discussion of the technical achievements of the Powerhouse and whether there is existing fabric that would exhibit a high degree of technical achievement in NSW.

Criterion D

An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

As the winner of the AIA National President's Award for Recycled Buildings, the NSW AIA Chapter Belle Interiors Award for Interior Design and a being finalist for the National Sir Zelman Cowen Award, TICCIH assumes that the Powerhouse at would have a strong or special association with at least the Architectural community having achieved such recognition at state level. Therefore the questions of whether Powerhouse meets this criterion needs to be discussed.

Criterion E

An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history.

Again, we note there is no attempt to consider this question. Even though the likelihood of archaeological deposits is low there may be significant evidence in the building's fabric which meets this criterion.

Criterion F

An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history.

The Powerhouse possesses in its interior items of International heritage significance. For example, the Powerhouse's own website states that the Boulton and Watt steam engine may be the most significant technological artefact ever to reach Australia. Certainly, it was one of the earliest rotative (wheel-turning) steam engines to be built and is the oldest in existence.

The Powerhouse also possesses Locomotive No 1, the first NSWGR locomotive and the oldest preserved locomotive in Australia. It is of National significance for inaugurating the first passenger service in NSW. We therefore believe that more attention should be paid as to how the Powerhouse Museum might address this criterion.

Criterion G

An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's cultural or natural places or cultural or natural environments.

Although the Powerhouse was stripped of all its machinery prior to adaptive reuse and that the 1988 Wran building, and other additions associated with adaptive reuse of the site, further impacted the legibility core heritage buildings, it is still possible to consider the Powerhouse to be readable as a power-generation and distribution site. We therefore suggest that attention be focused on whether the place could demonstrate these principal characteristics, and if so, how important it would be. The report, *Industrial Heritage of Power Generation in Australia*, indicates that very few if any of the original Power Stations in Australia retain their original equipment⁴. That being so, the preservation of the main structures indicating the functional areas of the Power House may be important in demonstrating the characteristics of early power generation and distribution.

⁴ See Volume 3 Godden Mackay 2005

The International Committee on the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage



Conclusion

Having reviewed the nomination and associated documents, TICCIH is very supportive of the nomination proceeding as we observe that it meets a minimum of two criteria, and that if further investigations into the place's significance were undertaken, more criteria would be met at a State level of significance.

Comment on the Independent review

The listing website has a link to an independent review of the listing which has come to different conclusions to that of TICCIH.⁵ We note that the ICOMOS Burra Charter Article 4.1 states, *Conservation should make use of all the knowledge, skills and disciplines which can contribute to the study and care of the place.*⁶ In reviewing this document we note that, absent from the author's list of distinguished projects are any to do with industrial heritage and that it could not be established from the Lonergan report that skills such as those of a Professional Historian or a specialist in Industrial Heritage were part of the project team.

This absence of appropriate expertise perhaps explains the lack of reference to core internationally recognised conservation documents such as the *The Nizhny Tagil Charter for the Industrial Heritage*⁷ or the *ICOMOS -TICCIH Dublin principals*.⁸

It is TICCIH's view therefore that the absence of appropriate skillsets in the review process is a fatal flaw in its construction and therefore it lacks credibility.

TICCIH therefore very much welcomes the listing of the Ultimo Tramways Power House, but recommends that an independent review of the listing of industrial heritage sites should be undertaken by a team with appropriate skillsets so as to ensure that the work is comprehensive and balanced.

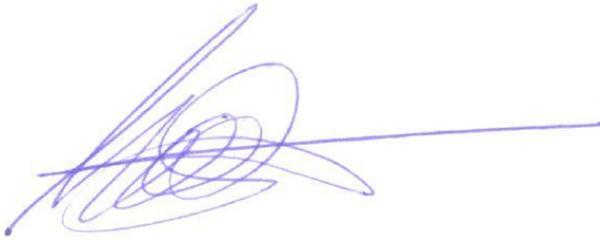
⁵ Lonergan, Peter Assessment of Heritage Significance Power House Museum Ultimo Tramways: Independent Review Rev B. Prepared on 30 January 2020 by Cracknell and Lonergan Architects Pty. Ltd. for Heritage NSW, Dept. of Premier & Cabinet (2020).

⁶ ICOMOS, Australia. The Burra Charter : The Australia Icomos Charter for Places of Cultural Significance 2013. Burwood, Vic.: Australia ICOMOS, 2013.

⁷ The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial, Heritage. The Nizhny Tagil Charter for the Industrial Heritage. (2003).

⁸ The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial, Heritage. Joint Icomos – Ticcih Principles for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage Sites , Structures , Areas and Landscapes « the Dublin Principles ». (2011).

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr Miles Oglethorpe
TICCIH President