

A Week of Mourning for the Powerhouse Museum

The Powerhouse Museum Alliance (PMA) is calling for a week of mourning for the Powerhouse Museum. To mark the start of this final week there was a poignant funeral procession on Sunday 28th, led by a piper playing a lament, concluding with speeches and the laying of wreaths and heartfelt messages on a mock coffin.

The Powerhouse Museum is not saved; it is closing on 4 February. The PHM will never reopen in any recognisable form as the museum loved by generations of visitors.

There is just one week left to take a last look at the Powerhouse Museum and see Leo Schofield's *1001 Remarkable Objects* before the museum is closed for years, and the collection disappears to storage, never to return.

Arts Minister John Graham has broken the explicit promises he made only five months ago to keep the museum open, save the Powerhouse Museum, and save the Wran legacy. And he has broken the hearts of the museum's supporters who put their trust in Labor.

There are no actual renewal plans, only lies, secrecy, and spin. The PHM is being defunded. Its budget reallocated. The collection is being evicted from its purpose designed settings and exhibition galleries, disappeared to Castle Hill or scattered to organisations willing to take a very large object off the PHM hands. The staff are going to Castle Hill. And the museum's state of the art collection facilities emptied, wasted, and handed to businesses, creatives and UTS, free of charge.

Of the promised \$250m for the revitalisation, Labor has allocated only \$119m over the next four years. There is no chance the museum will reopen as promised in 2027. The budget papers show completion in 2033. The government has not said where the missing \$131m in funding will come from, but this will likely involve sale of the PHM's assets. The government is hoping everyone will have forgotten what the real Powerhouse Museum was like if and when it reopens in 10 years' time as a creative industries, arts and entertainment centre. That is the real plan.

What survives after the museum's closure, collection eviction and asset stripping will be just Powerhouse Ultimo; not a museum but a downsized arts and entertainment centre for creative industries and contemporary fashion. Cheap to run as a shopfront, but low on education outcomes and visitor appeal.

For the first time since 1893 there will be no museum in Ultimo, no collections and no museum staff. It is the end of 143 years of museum history as the PHM is shuttered and emptied of its collections, curators and educators. The power and meaning is draining away with every truckload of objects leaving the museum forever.

The PHM's defining power and transport collections, the treasures of NSW, are being evicted from the museum that was purpose designed to display them, and scattered to any takers around the state. They will never return to the former museum and will never be seen together again. It is the end of this country's most significant installation of steam engines working under live steam. And the end of the amazing installation of *Transport, Flight and Space*, purpose designed for the boiler hall. The future concept for the former transport gallery is a venue hire opportunity, with a few objects left as party props.

Please visit the PHM in the coming week and say goodbye to the collection wonderland of the real Powerhouse Museum, a magical place loved by generations of families. Wear black if so inclined. Leave a flower, a message or a token of affection at the front. Ask yourself why is this great museum closing in a hurry a year before plans are approved and contracts let? And if you think this is a waste of money, a betrayal of trust and bad idea contact the Premier, your local MP, and sign the petition.

Jennifer Sanders, former Deputy Director of the PHM This is a slap in the face for the museum's longstanding audiences, its donors, benefactors, and the people of NSW who are the owners of the Powerhouse Museum. There are no renewal plans, no exhibition plans. The management's only plan is to get rid of the collections so the museum's former exhibition spaces can be monetised for venue hire. The Powerhouse Museum is being destroyed NOT revitalised. What the visionary Wran Government built over ten years of careful planning, integrated design and open communication, the Minns Government is sweeping away in haste and secrecy, breaking every promise on the way. The Unmaking of the Powerhouse Museum began in 2014 as an asset grab and a property play, and this is how it is finishing.

Dr Lindsay Sharp the Powerhouse Museum's founding director and leader during its design and development: No one at the Powerhouse Museum's triumphant opening in 1988 could have imagined that only 35 years later the museum would be closed and stripped of its major exhibitions, its most significant collections scattered, and its underpinning narrative and education purpose discarded like an old chip wrapper. This destructive saga is unprecedented in modern museum history in Australia or overseas. Museum experts from the PMA have given the government multiple options to renew the PHM and keep it open. None of these plans was even considered. Instead of genuine renewal the management of MAAS is intent on a radical breakup of the museum's purpose and remit, away from science, technology, applied arts and education to contemporary art and creative industries. This is already a failure with visitors. And now it is putting at risk a world class institution with collections of global importance in science, technology, transport, design, social history and the decorative arts. The PHM is not finished but its future is at risk. It can be saved by determined, positive public advocacy by everyone who cares about the museum and its unique mission.

Former trustee Kylie Winkworth: What's happened to the Powerhouse Museum over the last nine years is a shameful tale of political opportunism, waste, asset destruction, broken promises and secretive lobbying to evict the museum from the valued property built and endowed by the Wran Government and generations of NSW taxpayers. The public interest has come last in this cultural fiasco. The closure of the Powerhouse Museum is unnecessary, wasteful and destructive. The looming loss of Sydney's major heritage museum is a cultural and tourism disaster for Sydney.

Powerhouse Museum Alliance 28 January 2024 <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/>

See also Labor's Ten Broken Promises on the PHM <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/what-the-experts-say/winkworth-labors-ten-broken-promises-on-the-powerhouse-museum-and-more/>

Wasting the PHM's Assets <https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/phm-being-destroyed-not-saved-2023-call-to-action/kylie-winkworth-wasting-the-powerhouse-museums-assets-and-purpose/>