

## **Opinion/Letter SMH**

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The joint media release by Ministers Graham and Kamper, (*Labor's \$300million Powerhouse Museum revamp hit by last minute hitch, June 27*), is yet more Labor spin to disguise a wasteful, expensive, consistently unpopular project that is as far from being a 'heritage revitalisation' of the 145 year old Powerhouse Museum as it could be without actually razing the site.

The State Heritage Listing of the Powerhouse Museum Complex is a confected hoax. The 13 exemptions green light the demolition of all the post 1980 fabric of the Museum erasing the design and defining characteristics cited in the 1988 Sulman Award for the Powerhouse Museum. These exemptions were specified by INSW to facilitate this goal and even go so far as to demolish the original 1899 Engine Room floor.

The Heritage Assessment Reports by Robertson and Hindmarsh 2022, commissioned by Heritage NSW, by Design 5 Architects 2021, commissioned by Create NSW and by Lovell and Chen 2024, commissioned by City of Sydney, all found that the Powerhouse Museum was of exceptional significance and merited State Heritage Listing. Yet, despite strong public support for the Listing, the Heritage Council failed to protect the people's Powerhouse Museum, as did the Minister for Heritage, as did the City of Sydney, as did Create NSW, as did the Minister for the Arts.

The fake State Heritage Listing only protects the walls of the Ultimo Power House, but not the 1899 Engine House and not the 1988 Sulman award winning Powerhouse Museum. The Museum's mezzanines will be demolished taking out 75% of the exhibition space. The three theatres will be demolished as well as circulation, viewpoints, the boardroom - a feature in the Galleria, education zones and much more. An unbelievable waste of money and, of an acclaimed Museum only 37 years old. As we pointed out – do the long delayed repairs and maintenance, renew the exhibitions and reopen the Powerhouse Museum to the families, school groups and tourists who have flocked to experience its wonders since 1988.

What principles did these entities and individuals have when it came to the heritage protection of one of the world's great museums? Apparently none! And our money is now to be wasted on the Museum's demolition despite more than a decade of Inquiries, objections, protests and lobbying for the Museum's genuine renewal. Positive proposals from Lionel Glendenning, Dr Lindsay Sharp, myself and others (without fee), to repair, renew and reopen the Powerhouse Museum to its public asap were ignored.

From my 30 year career at the Museum I know that the Museum's exhibition space is 21,080m<sup>2</sup> as stated in original PHM documents. The Ministers' statement that the PHM's exhibition space is only 6,850sqm is wrong. They have, at best, been poorly advised. The Powerhouse Museum Alliance and Save the Powerhouse have corrected this ridiculous underestimation many times to no avail as the facts do not suit the fantasy that Labor's demolition job will be a 'museum revitalisation'. The Museum's exhibition record stands. A world leading museum, it presented 494 exhibitions from 1988 to 2018 - in the Powerhouse Museum, across NSW, Australia and the world - and then many more until its closing blockbuster - former Trustee, Leo Schofield's magnificent opus to the Powerhouse Museum and its collection - *1001 Remarkable Objects*.

Another correction - the Wran Building, with its grand entry, and the Galleria, with its promenade, were always exhibition galleries. In fact, the beating heart of the Powerhouse

Museum was in the Galleria - the irreplaceable 1794 Boulton & Watt engine under steam. The stated intent to 'return' the Boulton & Watt, the Catalina and No 1 Locomotive to the emptied remnant building is crass and devoid of any museological purpose or context.

The Ministers' media release outlines a wasteful scheme which has been finagled despite decade long protests against, first the Berejiklian Liberal Government's plans to move the museum to Parramatta, and then, against Labor's breaking of their promise to actually save the Museum.

The culmination of this deceit will be the erasure of the 145 year old Powerhouse Museum. It will no longer be at Ultimo, its home since 1893 where the Museum was reborn in 1988 and where it has an enviable record of popular success and museological triumph setting standards for museums worldwide. Nor will the Museum be evident in the immersive exhibition, commercial, events, theatre, demonstration kitchen & kitchen garden, convention centre et al on Parramatta's flood plain. Nor will the Museum be at Castle Hill which is a collection storage facility.

The misnamed Powerhouse Ultimo Revitalisation is a cultural crime perpetrated by the Labor Government who are apparently at ease with destroying the visionary cultural legacy of, not only the Wran Labor Government, but also of Sir Henry Parkes, Colonial Secretary when the Museum was founded in 1880 who knew that the Museum was a keystone for the colony's development.

No civilised society destroys a museum yet here in NSW, Labor is destroying our Powerhouse Museum.

It is not too late for Labor to actually save the Powerhouse Museum - as promised. History and future generations will thank them for it if they do.

Jennifer Sanders

Russell Lea

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Powerhouse Museum 1978 - 2009

Powerhouse Museum Alliance co-founder