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‘Where the city started’: Parramatta’s hidden architectural gems unlocked for a day



[Anthony Segaert](#)

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Seventeen of western Sydney’s tallest, oldest and weirdest buildings will be opened to the public next month as part of a major expansion of the Sydney Open series.

Parramatta Open will unlock access to a variety of spaces across the city, including Australia’s oldest remaining public building, Old Government House.

Constructed from as early as 1799 in the middle of Parramatta Park (then a private domain), the building was used as a country residence by some of the earliest governors of the colony of NSW.



Old Government House is being opened up to the public as part of Parramatta Open.

WOLTER PEETERS

The building sat empty for a while, with the King's School in North Parramatta briefly using it for student accommodation. Now, the National Trust runs the home – with occasional reports of it being haunted.

Parramatta has “a really incredible connection” to Sydney’s history, said Tania Quax, the public events manager at Sydney Open. “It’s clearly the historic centre of the city, and yet most people aren’t aware of that.” “That was really where the city started. Everything was moving up and down the river.”

[The August 29 program](#) will feature buildings from Australia’s earliest colonial period: Elizabeth Farm, the oldest homestead in the country; the chequered [Parramatta Female Factory](#); St John’s Anglican Cathedral; and tiny rangers’ cottages deep in Parramatta Park built before the turn of the 18th century.

It will also give behind-the-scenes access to some of the city’s newest developments. Locals are invited into some of the highest levels of Sydney’s largest commercial building by floor space, 6-8 Parramatta Square; the council chambers held in the top of the public library building; and into restricted tunnels surrounding the Parramatta Aquatic Centre.



Old Government House was a secluded place for NSW’s earliest governors and their families to relax, away from the busy Sydney city. WOLTER PEETERS

Sydney Open has been running since 1997 as a celebration of the city’s public architecture, history and design. But Quax said the Sydney Open programmers always knew they were “missing a trick” by only opening buildings around the Sydney CBD – or a stretch into Darlinghurst.

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“You can do the whole day as a choose-your-own-adventure,” Quax said. The Sydney West Trial Courts complex, Leigh Memorial Church, and Our Lady of Mercy College are also on the list for openings.

The program is also providing ticket-buyers with the chance to win access to the Powerhouse Parramatta before its official opening later this year.

“The day is really all about goodwill,” Quax said. “The day in Parramatta will have 150-170 volunteers. There’s a sense of pride in their city.”