

**Updated submission on the State Heritage Significance of the Powerhouse Museum Complex, including the Powerhouse Museum Collection, (being an extension to Ultimo Power House, State Heritage Register item 020045) - John Petersen - 24 May 2024**

I strongly support the extension to the listing of the Powerhouse Museum Complex (being an extension to the Ultimo Power House, State Heritage Register item 020045) and I strongly support the expanded Proposed Curtilage, Powerhouse Museum Complex, Ultimo NSW, Plan 3326 (10 October 1993). This extension to the Ultimo Power House, State Heritage Register item 020045 ensures that the Harwood Building, Forecourt, Wran Building and Galleria and exhibition halls, and key power and transport movable heritage and fixtures, exteriors and interiors, ramps and mezzanines are included in the State Heritage Register listing for the Powerhouse Museum Complex and recognised as significant heritage fabric of a State Significant cultural institution, the Powerhouse Museum, created to house the Powerhouse Museum Collection. This is on account of the place's historic, aesthetic and social significance for the people of NSW and the Complex's State heritage significance as (a) one integrated museum complex of old and new places, and interiors and exteriors - and key power and transport movable heritage items and fixtures for which the Complex was purpose designed to hold and display<sup>1</sup>, a Sulman Award winning Complex of historic, social and aesthetic significance and a public museum of historic, social and aesthetic significance since its 1980s construction and adaptive reuse (b) a Complex recognising that the former Ultimo Tram Depot, known as the Harwood Building and Ultimo Power Station are inextricably linked historically from the era when Sydney had one of the world's great electric tramway systems and when one powered the operations of the other. Both buildings are rare at the State level and rarer still as a pairing - one is a component of the other and in heritage terms both buildings are inseparable.

The State heritage significance of the Powerhouse Museum Complex is evidenced by four RAI A award citations, Graeme Davison and Kimberly Webber (eds) *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005 and the social significance at the State level by submissions and representations by the group, members and community of Save the Powerhouse Museum for 9 years and I am informed, 10 rounds of public consultation. Architect Lionel Glendenning is available to provide primary source materials and knowledge and he has stated that he exercises his Moral Rights in his designs.

The Powerhouse Museum Complex requires a new Conservation Management Plan of the highest order to guide and inform all decisions about this place and collection of State heritage significance and the extension to the Ultimo Power House, State Heritage Register.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Spearitt 'Positioning On Site and In Situ' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005

## Aesthetic Significance

I note that the 1980s Complex as a whole is of aesthetic significance recognised by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Architectural Awards in NSW in 1988 with the Sir John Sulman Award for Public Buildings (Government Architect's Office, Lionel Glendenning, principal architect with notable interior colour schemes and carpets by the esteemed George Freedman<sup>2</sup>) - the citation stressed the 'collision' of old and new and of inside and outside.<sup>3</sup> The circulation patterns, including the Forecourt as the first point of arrival ahead of the Harris Street entry, Galleria, exhibition halls, internal ramps and mezzanines won also the RAIAC ACROD Award for barrier free circulation. The ramps and mezzanines were part of Lionel Glendenning's integrated design scheme for the Powerhouse Museum Complex with a particular interest in allowing access and viewing opportunities and sightlines for key and major collection holdings, in particular large power and transport objects<sup>4</sup>. The Complex was purpose designed to conserve and display major power and transport objects. These could often be viewed from under and upwards, or to the sides or downwards, or tall objects along ramps<sup>5</sup>. These large power and transport objects are part of the aesthetic significance of the Powerhouse Museum Complex not just as fixtures or movable heritage items but as elements of a visual presentation interior scheme designed for and around them 'how many architects get to use such magnificent props as space craft, trains and aeroplanes as interior design modules?'<sup>6</sup>. This is particularly evident in the Galleria and Engine Room (power movable heritage) and Boiler House (transport movable heritage) halls. The old buildings' 'varied character are joined by the insertion of stepped floors surmounted by two vaulted halls, one glazed and one covered-over. A colonnade, corner plaza and rear courtyard complete the ensemble. The internal arrangement cleverly exploits the fall of the site and the floors of the halls, to provide a sequence of overlapping views. Across the stepping down of the volumes runs a long ramp system, passing tall exhibits at various levels. The old buildings are in the functional tradition, most apt for the historical technology of many of the exhibits. This character is enhanced by the new detailing ...'<sup>7</sup>.

Harry Seidler referenced the Government Architect's Office and Lionel Glendenning's dramatic curved white roof scheme with a wave shaped roof for his Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre and his colonnade of shaped concrete piloti columns on Harris Street complemented

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<sup>2</sup> Communication with former Acting Director, Jennifer Sanders 8 April 2024 and 'George Freedman, Interior Designer To The Rich and Famous of Sydney' Sydney Morning Herald, 23 August 2016 <https://www.smh.com.au/national/george-freedman-interior-designer-to-the-rich-and-famous-of-sydney-20160811-ggqc4n.html> accessed 8 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Peter Spearitt quoting the Sulman Award citation 'Positioning On Site and In Situ' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005 p250

<sup>4</sup> 'Threats to and Removal of Industrial Heritage at the Powerhouse Museum as at 4 September 2022' Jennifer Sanders and Curators and Conservators, Andrew Grant, Debbie Rudder, Ian Debenham, Brad Baker, Pat Townley

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Architecture Design Awards 1988 research files held by Jennifer Sanders

<sup>7</sup> Architecture Australia September 1988 research files held by Jennifer Sanders

the Complex's Harris Street colonnade to form a precinct of civic buildings of architectural excellence and easy public access<sup>8</sup>. The entire Complex is a State significant landmark and Sydney city gateway, including the white roof of the Wran building, when viewed from the A4 motorway, William Henry Street, Darling Harbour and Chinatown and also the corner of Harris Street and Macarthur Street which also has vistas of the immense scale and wonder of the Ultimo Power Station. This was noted in 1988 also 'From the main approaches in Ultimo, the new buildings are positive and assert a striking presence in form and colour, a welcome point of emphasis in the otherwise busy industrial traffic.'<sup>9</sup> The Forecourt is an integral part of the Powerhouse Museum Complex scheme allowing uninterrupted vistas toward the Wran Building and the 19<sup>th</sup> century façade of the Ultimo Power House. Like the colonnade, it is part of Lionel Glendenning's 'layering in' from Harris Street, a response recognising the heritage values of terraces across the street and mediating between the grand scale of the Power Station to the tiny terraces across the street. 'The layers of the building begin with the Harris Street colonnade, continue through the foyer space until into the Great Boiler House.'<sup>10</sup> The Forecourt is also a public space that bridges the visual 'collision' between old and new. It provides 'a sense of excitement and expectation, giving a most appropriate welcome to a building with varied and exciting interiors'<sup>11</sup>. It is also an assembly point ahead of entering the Powerhouse Museum Complex and Lionel Glendenning's museum concept where upon the Harris Street entry the museum becomes a 'lost pathway' whereby 'the architecture does not direct its guests but lets them find their own path'<sup>12</sup>. The Complex also won the RAIA National Awards 1988 including the RAIA Belle Award for Interiors, the suite of which are substantially intact, including some coloured paint finishes and carpets (both rare survivors in a public and commercial building designed for the interior by the esteemed George Freedman<sup>13</sup>), display cases and intact marble floor surfaces, ramps, mezzanines and metal balustrade railings. It was noted in 1988 'the interiors at the Powerhouse are dazzling. A tour-de-force of form, colour, shape, pattern and texture'<sup>14</sup>. It is well known that the Complex was designed around key objects that also were integrated into interior and display treatments. For example, the Powerhouse Galleria was designed to display Locomotive No 1 and the Boulton and Watt beam engine<sup>15</sup>. The 'lofty' Galleria in the Wran Building ... 'not only looks industrial in style, it also sits on and

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<sup>8</sup> Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre in [www.seidler.net.au](http://www.seidler.net.au)

<sup>9</sup> Architecture Australia September 1988 research files held by Jennifer Sanders

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Farrelly referencing Lionel Glendenning in 'Power House Dreaming House' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005 pp226-227.

<sup>11</sup> Architecture Design Awards 1988 loc cit

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Farrelly 'Power House Dreaming House' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005 p227.

<sup>13</sup> Communication with former Acting Director, Jennifer Sanders 8 April 2024 and George Freedman, Interior Designer To The Rich and Famous of Sydney' Sydney Morning Herald, 23 August 2016 <https://www.smh.com.au/national/george-freedman-interior-designer-to-the-rich-and-famous-of-sydney-20160811-gqqc4n.html> accessed 8 April 2024

<sup>14</sup> Architecture Design Awards 1988 loc cit

<sup>15</sup> Graeme Davison and Debbie Rudder 'The Heroic Age of Steam' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005 p213

preserves old infrastructures ... resembling a giant Gothic nave, it lies along one of the old Ultimo service alleys. How fitting that the Galleria is the dramatic stage setting, now, for Loco no 1'<sup>16</sup>. The Powerhouse Museum Complex also won the 1988 RAI Award for a Recycled Building.

The original Ken Done AM murals, an artist now celebrated, including with the 2022 Australian Fashion Lifetime Achievement Award and the 2013 Design Institute of Australia Hall of Fame Award are still surviving under white paint in the former Members' Lounge. A popular 1980s artist, including for murals in contemporary public buildings, this series of murals would now be rare examples in New South Wales and potentially sole survivors. The Board Room retains a playful Trompe-l'œil ceiling and the Kings Cinema is also intact. The colourful original painted interiors of the Harwood Building by George Freedman are also largely intact.

The State heritage significance of the Complex is greater than just the Ultimo Power House and includes all surviving elements of the 1988 exterior and interior schemes and circulation and object viewing patterns, including the entrance via a public Forecourt and the playful and modernist integration or 'collision' of old and new. It also retains significant power and transport movable heritage objects that the Complex was purpose designed to house. Lionel Glendenning rejected the conventional 'black box' approach to galleries in his Sulman award winning design which included a Design Reference Group. This included working with curators to determine new and better ways to exhibit the Powerhouse Museum Collection. For the large transport objects, this meant from ramps and mezzanines, looking up, across and down<sup>17</sup>.

The Powerhouse Museum Complex is also significant for its references to Sydney's Garden Palace<sup>18</sup> with its fanlight windows, in particular the Wran Building with its glass and curves that reflect also Paxton's Crystal Palace of 1851<sup>19</sup> and the great 19<sup>th</sup> century museums and galleries of Europe internally also with its board room Trompe-l'œil ceiling 'a playful parody of Tiepolo'<sup>20</sup> and Wran Building murals of 'blue sky and floating cloud' on Level 6, the Galleria for public assembly with its soaring height and 'a statement in high Gothic with its clerestory lighting and its membrane-like use of glass'<sup>21</sup>, and marble floor surfaces in pinks, greens and whites. It is a sophisticated post-modern building drawing together a 'collision' and fusion of cultural architectural and decorative arts references to 19<sup>th</sup> century European museums and galleries combined with the adaptive reuse of an industrial and 'scientific' pair of power and transport buildings to create a late 20<sup>th</sup> century Museum of Applied Arts

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<sup>16</sup> *Architecture Australia* September 1988 research files held by Jennifer Sanders

<sup>17</sup> Peter Spearitt 'Positioning On Site and In Situ' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005

<sup>18</sup> *Architecture Australia* September 1988 loc cit

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

and Sciences. The eclectic references are outlined in detail in *Architecture Australia* September 1988.

### **Social Value**

The Complex as a whole has social significance at the State level as a much-loved public museum, including the Wran Building and Galleria, exhibition halls, Forecourt and Harwood Building, for former staff, Australia's museum, science and design community, as well as multicultural and rural and regional communities and the people of NSW as the 'Peoples Museum' as evidenced by the petitions and long-standing and high profile and sustained 9 year campaign to Save the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo. The submissions forwarded to the NSW Government over an estimated 10 exhausting rounds of public consultation are a rich body of evidence supporting the Powerhouse Museum Complex as being a place of Social Value in the present for the people of New South Wales and an outstanding and above ordinary community attachment including for power and transport movable heritage and fixtures. The white curved roof of the Wran Building has social significance as a Sydney landmark and the Forecourt has social significance as a popular assembly point for rallies and First Nations smoking ceremonies and as a public space and square meeting place at the entrance of the 'Peoples Museum' being an integral part of the Harris Street public entry scheme designed by Lionel Glendenning. The Forecourt is a key component of the Museum's original point of entry from an external and shared public and civic space to an internal shared public and civic space in the Galleria. It is the only public square or space in the civic, media, arts and sports precinct facing Harris Street. The Harwood Building also has social significance for former staff, Australia's museum, science and design community including as the home to the Collection and museum staff and for a design, decorative arts and applied sciences public library since 1988. It was the 10-year home for the NSW Migration Heritage Centre from 2003 until 2013 and linked to an Australian Communities Gallery in the Complex. The Harwood Building and former Australian Communities Gallery space has significance for their impact in working and researching in partnership, connecting and maintaining relationships with communities that were not recognised historically in Australian museums including with the influential 'Faith Fashion Fusion, Islamic Women's Style in Australia' (2012 and 2015/16) which later toured Australia and Asia, 'Ties With Tradition: Macedonian Apron Designs' (2009) and 'The Forgotten Children' (2007 which was one catalyst, led by David Hill, for both the Premier of NSW (2009) and the Prime Minister of Australia (2009) to apologise to the 'Forgotten Australians'. The Complex still has social significance for these communities as a place where their stories could be told in their own voices, validated as historic knowledge and lived experiences and presented with pride or respect.

The Locomotive No 1 and Boulton and Watt beam engine, Engine Room and Boiler House and some contents (including planes, space, trains, indicator board, trams) Strasburg Clock, Kings Cinema are fixtures or movable heritage items that have social significance for the

people of NSW and are an integral part of the Powerhouse Museum Complex's integrated design (being purpose designed for major power and transport objects) and social significance at the State level. In 2009 the Strasburg Clock was noted as being one of the Museum's most popular exhibits for over a century<sup>22</sup>.

### Historic Significance

The former Ultimo Tram Depot, today known as the Harwood Building, is inextricably linked and associated historically with the Ultimo Power Station and vice versa from when 'Sydney had one of the world's great electric tramway systems'<sup>23</sup>. Tony Brassil has identified the former Ultimo Tram Depot as the first and only surviving tram depot shed in NSW. It was built to service the new electric tram fleet operating in central Sydney and is recognised by Brassil as being of historic significance at the State level for its association with the replacement of steam trams with electrical traction in Sydney in 1899. It is closely associated with the Ultimo Power House and the trams for which it was built to supply. Brassil also notes that the Former Tram Depot is significant for its adaptation and reuse as part of the Powerhouse Museum Complex as a rare and bold investment in heritage and the historic culture of the State by a Government in NSW<sup>24</sup>.

The Complex has additional historic significance at the State level including the public Forecourt, Wran Building, Galleria, exhibition halls and Harwood Building in the extension to the Ultimo Power House listing. Emeritus Professor, Peter Spearitt, an eminent urban and environmental historian, noted, citing the 1978 Relocation Study undertaken by the NSW Government Architects Office, that the Powerhouse Museum Complex was 'born in an atmosphere of spectacular museum developments elsewhere in the world, especially North American science museums'<sup>25</sup>. Plans for the adaptive reuse of the Ultimo Power House and Ultimo Tram Depot were to be an example of the innovative conservation and recycling of old buildings in the face of Darling Harbour's transformation with new public buildings. Even if not in the specific sense of the articles of the 1979 Burra Charter they were recognised at the time as vast spaces and in themselves fine examples of industrial archaeology to be preserved. They were early examples of adaptive reuse in Australia on a large and arguably unprecedented scale. The Ultimo Tram Depot became the Harwood Building, a purpose-built museum structure retaining its service trenches, a section of tram track and overall

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<sup>22</sup> Graeme Davison 'The Secret Life of the Strasburg Clock' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005 p149

<sup>23</sup> Peter Spearitt 'Positioning On Site and In Situ' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005 p253

<sup>24</sup> Tony Brassil, Industrial Heritage Specialist, National Trust of Australia (NSW) *Ultimo Tram Depot (The Harwood Building) History and Significance*, April 2019

<sup>25</sup> Peter Spearitt 'Positioning On Site and In Situ' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005 p242

form and original external masonry and the Ultimo Power House retained the enormous Boiler Hall, Turbine Hall and Switch House<sup>26</sup>.

The Powerhouse Museum Complex has been associated with the story of power and transport - since its beginnings including throughout its history as a public museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, with social history as its context, built including to display collections associated with power and transport<sup>27</sup>. The Locomotive No 1 and Boulton and Watt beam engine in the Galleria, exhibition halls and some contents, Strasburg Clock, Kings Cinema (said to include original as well as reconstructed items) are fixtures or movable heritage items that have historic significance as an integral part of the historic significance of the Powerhouse Museum Complex that was purpose designed as a place to house them with barrier free access and sightlines by Lionel Glendenning.

It also has historic significance for its services and structural engineering prototypes developed for the project<sup>28</sup>. The Powerhouse Museum Complex was the first major museum in Australia to be rebuilt and reinvigorated in the 1980s<sup>29</sup> and services and structural engineering prototypes were innovative or even without precedent for the adaptive reuse of an industrial place as a museum with environmental controls. The Powerhouse Museum Complex was not conceived or delivered as a Bicentenary Project. The planning and announcement for the Powerhouse Museum in 1978 at Ultimo predates the Darling Harbour Authority by six years in 1984 and was about celebrating the Museum's own 1888-1978 centenary<sup>30</sup>. The Bicentenary was merely a useful catalyst for construction and scheduling of opening. The Powerhouse Museum Complex is historically significant in the development and evolution of museology and the presentation, through public and community access of collections and exhibitions for culture and learning, in Australia from the 1980s to the present. Its staff and collection practices developed at the Complex have been influential in Australia and internationally including curatorially for the development of the method *Significance 2.0*<sup>31</sup> through the former Collections Council of Australia. The collection catalogue is known to be the first globally to be made available for universal and discoverable public access through the web, decades before digitisation projects. The Complex is also associated with the development of pioneering virtual museums and sites including the NSW Migration Heritage Centre, the National Quilt Register and the Australian

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Spearitt 'Positioning On Site and In Situ' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005 pp 244-246

<sup>27</sup> Graeme Davison and Debbie Rudder 'The Heroic Age of Steam' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005 p201

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Sanders in conversation with architect Lionel Glendenning 'Memories, Reminiscences and Thoughts' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005

<sup>29</sup> Kevin Fewster 'Into the Future' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005 p255

<sup>30</sup> Peter Spearitt 'Positioning On Site and In Situ' in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: The Powerhouse Museum and Its Precursors 1880-2005*, Powerhouse Publishing 2005

<sup>31</sup> Roslyn Russell and Kylie Winkworth *Significance 2.0: A Guide to Assessing the Significance of Collections* Collections Council of Australia, 2009 (revision of 2001 version)

Dress Register as portals and extensions to public access to collections. The Complex is historically significant for its associations with the development and delivery of curatorial outreach services for collections dispersed across NSW and partnerships with local government and communities, including ethnic communities<sup>32</sup> and First Nations communities across the State. This is for culture and learning and in support of the 1990s/2000s concept of the Distributed National Collection and associated outreach and community cultural access to the Complex's collection, including objects held on site until recently.

The key movable heritage and fixed items that should be included in the Powerhouse Museum Complex (being an extension to the Ultimo Power House, State Heritage Register item 020045). Integral to its State heritage significance, as outlined above includes as follows (with those integrated into Lionel Glendenning's purpose designed Complex and actually powered by steam on site marked in bold. All objects relate to the architecture of the Complex including the award winning 'barrier free'<sup>33</sup> ramps and viewing platforms designed by Lionel Glendenning<sup>34</sup>):

**a. Galleria**

Locomotive No 1 and Carriages

**b. Power – Engine Room Ultimo Power House**

**Boulton and Watt beam engine (1785)**

**Maudslay beam engine**

Cylinder and valve control gear from Botany

**Marshall horizontal engine**

Merryweather fire engine

**Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies portable engine**

**Bellis and Morcom vertical engine**

Parsons turbine engine

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<sup>32</sup> John Petersen 'Though This Be Madness: Heritage Methods for Working in Culturally Diverse Communities' in *Public History Review* Vol 17, 2010 pp 34-51

<sup>33</sup> Royal Australian Institute of Architects Architectural Awards in NSW, 1988 Sir John Sulman Award for Public Buildings (Government Architect's Office, Lionel Glendenning, principal architect with notable interior colour schemes and carpets by the esteemed George Freedman ) and RAIA ACROD Award for barrier free circulation

<sup>34</sup> 'Threats to and Removal of Industrial Heritage at the Powerhouse Museum as at 4 September 2022' Jennifer Sanders and Curators and Conservators, Andrew Grant, Debbie Rudder, Ian Debenham, Brad Baker, Pat Townley



### **c. Transport – Boiler House Ultimo Power House**

Class Electric Tram

Horse Drawn Bus

Central Station Indicator Board

Steam Locomotive 1243

Governor's Railway Carriage

Sydney's Last Hansom Cab

Horse Drawn Spring Cart

1928 Austin Seven "Special" Motor Car

Chevrolet Car Body

Catalina Flying Boat

### **d. Recently Known Removed Key Movable Heritage Items Significant to the Complex**

Bleriot Monoplane

Wheeler Scout Microlight Aircraft

Refer to 'Threats to and Removal of Industrial Heritage at the Powerhouse Museum as at 4 September 2022' Jennifer Sanders and Curators and Conservators, Andrew Grant, Debbie Rudder, Ian Debenham, Brad Baker, Pat Townley – research file held by Kylie Winkworth

### **John Petersen, MPHA and MICOMOS**

Current Principal John Petersen Museum and Heritage Consulting; CEO and Company Secretary Multicultural Museums Victoria Limited; Casual Lecturer on 'Significance 2.0' for 'Master of Art Curatorship', The University of Melbourne.

Former inaugural Manager, NSW Migration Heritage Centre, Powerhouse Museum and Multicultural NSW; former Movable Heritage Officer and Acting Senior Heritage Officer, NSW Heritage Office; former Senior Conservation Officer, Australian Heritage Commission; former Head of Property and Supervising Curator, Hyde Park Barracks Museum, Historic Houses Trust of NSW and Federal Government heritage advisor on world heritage listed Port Arthur Historic Site and the Australian Convict Site, Norfolk Island.

24 May 2024