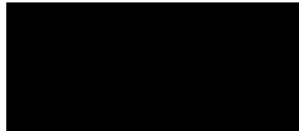


Thr Rt. Hon. Ms. Gladys Berejiklian
Premier Of New South Wales
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY 2000
CC: Formal Submissions,
Parramatta Powerhouse Environmental Impact Statement



29th June 2020

Dear Premier,

May I congratulate you on your excellent response to our two most recent disasters in New South Wales - the summer bushfires and the COVID19 pandemic. Your handling of these two difficult and demanding issues has been exemplary. You have demonstrated leadership, intelligence, and when required, restraint in steering our state through difficult times. I strongly recommend that you muster these same qualities to preserve the Powerhouse Museum in it's entirety at it's present location at Harris Street Ultimo.

What your government is proposing in moving the museum is destructive vandalism of public property worthy of a Fascist state. You are breaching the trust invested in you by the people of New South Wales in destroying a much valued and utilized public cultural and social institution. No one is saying that Parramatta doesn't deserve it's own museum, and that it too may become a significant cultural institution, but this should not and must not be at the cost of removing and/or dispersing the existing Powerhouse Museum at Harris St. Ultimo. The purpose-built adaptation of the Powerhouse building, completed in 1988 is an award winning design of international renown. What your government proposes as a replacement for the Powerhouse Museum on the riverfront at Parramatta is on flood-prone land, destroys two historic buildings currently protected by heritage orders, and does not provide museum standard environmental control for the preservation of objects. Your plans also breach the trust of thousands of people over generations who have donated objects to the Museum Of Applied Arts & Sciences collection in the knowledge the museum is centrally located at Ultimo.

HOW DARE YOU destroy what generations of Australians have built up over a century and a half to be kept in perpetuity for the present and future people of Australia and the world, as exemplars of excellence in Science and the Arts, and as documents of our social history. It is a collection of national and international significance and deserves to be properly housed in Sydney's metropolis, just as does the Australian Museum, The Art Gallery Of NSW, Government House, the Sydney Opera House and any number of other core cultural institutions.

By all means build a new museum at Parramatta. There are enough museum objects in the MAAS collection for this to happen, and they should be exhibited, in a properly conditioned museum environment and in a secure location, BUT NOT at the appalling cost of losing the Harris Street Powerhouse Museum.

Premier, you as leader of the present state government have the ability to prevent this potential disaster for New South Wales. If you preside over the destruction of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo, it is an act which will stick to you and your reputation for life, and to your legacy forever in New South Wales' History. I urge you to reverse your government's decision to close the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo, and to maintain it and properly fund it in it's present state.

I encourage you to read the attached newspaper articles which clearly demonstrate the views of this writer, and those of many concerned New South Wales citizens on this matter.

Yours faithfully,



Jonathan Frost

Brace for cultural destruction

We are about to witness one of the most shameful acts of cultural vandalism in the history of this country. On June 30, the NSW government will shut down to the public the Powerhouse

Museum in Ultimo, where it has existed as both a landmark and an attraction for 134 years, and gradually demolish it to make way for sale of the site to a preferred developer. Thus, yet more of the Sydney we love is being eradicated.

The Powerhouse has earned world renown and respect. It has assembled a unique, priceless and irreplaceable collection of objects relevant to the history of Australia in general and to NSW in particular. All aspects of human creativity – in science, technology, industry and the decorative arts – are represented in a collection that is now to be dispersed.

Many items will never be seen again and a good deal probably sold off.

This operation has, in my opinion, been deliberately and falsely described as a “relocation”. It is no such thing. To me, it is the wholesale destruction of a much loved institution and its replacement with another entity that will bear as much relation to the current museum as a Picasso does to a postcard. Only a miserable group of objects will be displayed in a smaller, uglier building in distant Parramatta.

Greeted with almost universal incredulity when announced six years ago, this absurd plan continues to meet with unshakable opposition from the public and from museum professionals.

In 2016, more than 10,000 Sydneysiders signed and presented to the government a petition to force the creation of a special, cross-party parliamentary inquiry committee to review the plan. That committee gave it a firm thumbs down.

The government barged ahead. Not even a pandemic has deflected the Premier from this disastrous, profligate course.

With a new site unsuitable and an old site so saleable, hopes are fading fast for sense to prevail, writes **Leo Schofield**.



the Powerhouse Parramatta project like a passenger on the Titanic to a flimsy raft.

Deaf to argument, blind to a need for fiscal sobriety and dumbly reciting her pro forma mantra, Premier Gladys Berejikian has declared the Parramatta move to be a project of state significance without giving a single good reason why it should jump the queue in front of social housing, schools, hospitals and regional cultural centres.

We are now up to Business Case Four and have not yet sighted cogent description of the proposal or a plausible cost-benefit analysis that might justify the risible claim of 1 million visitors a year to Parramatta. Two billion dollars are to be splurged on a plan that is not even half-baked. Shall we make that four? Or more?

The chosen site in Parramatta is manifestly unsuitable. It is flood prone. There is no room for expansion as none is contemplated. When, throughout the world, cultural institutions are expanding into satellite spaces, repurposing old buildings or creating new homes for expanding collections – we are shrinking them.

No thought has been given to alternative sites such as the White Bay Power Station. Just grab a bit of existing state land – carve off a slice of the Botanic Garden for the wretched Sydney Modern, which is not a gallery but a function centre in drag; level a prime site in the heart of Chinatown for whoever puts their hand up for it.

According to staff, the Premier has only set foot in the Powerhouse once. She is said to have found it “boring” – which is perhaps

why she left the running of the folly to her quondam arts minister, Don Harwin. Harwin actually took the job seriously. But duced by a handful of powerful figures in the cultural world and ever willing to lend an ear to any scheme that might dilute general opposition to the Ultimo eradication, he became a target for the self-interested vultures who descended on the site at the prospect of dismemberment.

A lyric theatre, a fashion museum, a centre of baroque excellence, these and many more claims were made for a piece of the corpse. The public still has no idea of what is imagined for Ultimo or for Parramatta, where the chief executive – whose expertise is confined to the world of contemporary visual arts and who has no significant experience with museums – paints only the fuzziest picture of her vision. Which is perhaps why it is shaping up to be another Carriageworks.

The inescapable fact is that apart from Berejikian and the Mayor of Parramatta, there is little or no support for the scheme. There is, however, unequivocal enthusiasm for something in Parramatta that does not involve the obliteration of the Powerhouse in Ultimo.

Female elephants have long pregnancies but in the end they bring forth something beautiful and noble. The gestation period for the Parramatta scheme has also been long. In six years the government has flung millions at it – \$14 million alone in consultant fees! – in a doomed attempt to produce a plausible business case. It has laboured long to bring forth another kind of elephant. A white elephant.

Leo Schofield was a trustee of the Powerhouse for 10 years. He was a member of the executive of the National Trust (NSW) and a chairman of the federal government's committee on new uses for heritage properties.

The public still has no idea of what is imagined for Ultimo.

To this government nothing is sacred, no beautiful sandstone buildings, no open spaces, nothing that can't be monetised. Extravagant new projects, all inevitably costing double or triple original estimates, have bloomed like flowers in spring. Tunnels have been dug, more and more roads built, historic suburbs bisected, ancient trees felled. Central Sydney has been gifted with an astronomically costly and already outmoded light rail.

All of this frenzied activity now forms part of what is one of the worst planned cities in the Western world and one of the most incoherent traffic systems.

But these failures pale into insignificance beside the Powerhouse “relocation”, which is not only physically and environmentally disastrous but also culturally destructive. What we would lose in the Powerhouse as a cultural and spiritual component of Sydney life can never be replaced.

Driven either by outmoded ideology, ignorance, bloody mindedness, political opportunism or by a malign combination of all: the government seems to have clung to



Supporters of the museum at the Ultimo site last week. Photo: Kate Geraghty

Proposal more 'pleasure palace' than museum

A new model of the Powerhouse Museum will rise up along the Parramatta River but not everyone is happy, writes **Linda Morris**.

In nine days the curtain will come down on the Catalina flying bird, the largest suspended plane in any museum in the world, Australia's best collection of working steam engines and the train destination board that stood for 76 years at Central Station.

The heritage halls of the Powerhouse Museum are to shut, the museum's purpose-built galleries housing the Locomotive No 1 and the Boulton and Watt steam engine to close 12 months later.

A new Powerhouse is to rise on the Parramatta riverfront by 2024.

To its opponents, including former and current staff, heritage and museum experts and advocates, this new Powerhouse will not be a museum so much as an entertainment pleasure palace, sucking up increasing amounts of Treasury revenue and public goodwill.

To chief executive Lisa Havilah, it will be Sydney's first example of a 21st-century cultural institution, drawing

mission and practice, the Parramatta Powerhouse will be much different from the institution it replaces.

Email chains within the design team and consultant reports track monumental changes to the project since state cabinet approval in 2018.

Refinement continues even as the Environment Impact Statement this month recommended the demolition of Parramatta heritage sites Willow Grove and St Georges Terrace.

Missing from the 17 boxes of documents are the 2020 business plans developed by the Berejiklian government and justifying the redevelopment of Ultimo and the building of the new Powerhouse.

The architectural plans confirm the Powerhouse will open with no permanent collection on display, no



Museum staff slowly and painstakingly take apart a Transavia Airtruk aircraft that has been exhibited for decades (above); below, Bruce Lay, with his rare posters from the 1920s. Photos: Kate Geraghty, Janie Barrett

exhibition and public spaces, which have yet to be made public and tested but likely assumes free general-entry and premium-ticketed events and exhibitions.

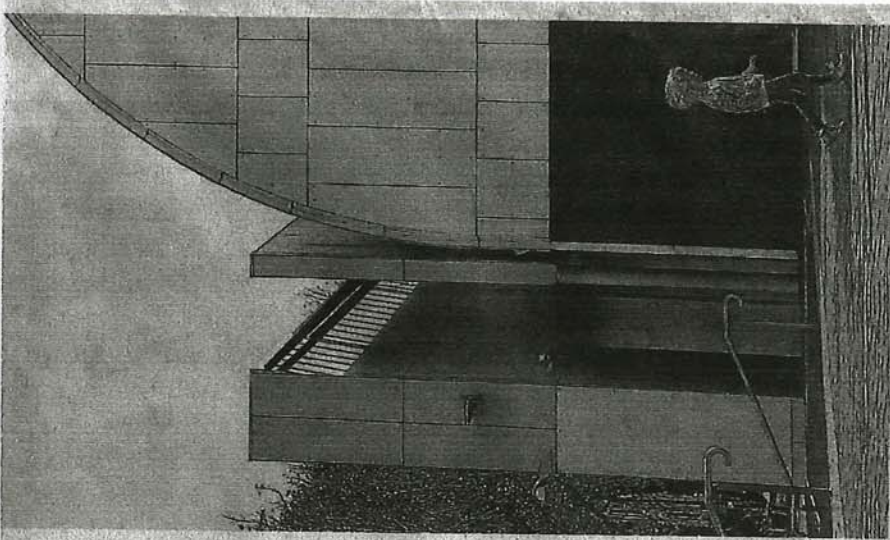
Inside the lattice framework of the Parramatta Powerhouse designed by architects Moreau Kusunoki Genton (MKG) will be seven presentation spaces stacked over the east and west wings, along with a research lab, apartments for visiting researchers, a rooftop terrace and a student dormitory.

The primary use of the presentation spaces will be staging exhibitions, Havilah says, but they have also been designed for flexible or "secondary" use and commercial events, documents seen by the *Herald* show.

The largest presentation space, capable of housing the Powerhouse Museum's iconic Locomotive No 1, can switch to a live music hall and venue for civic and corporate events.

Design teams are working on the broad assumption of eight-month-long exhibitions, four months of commercial programming and bump in-and-out, leading critics to question if the museum will be in service of its collection or other financial priorities.

Havilah says the building is being designed to display the collection but will be a more modern museum experience. Dynamic programming and flexible spaces will allow more of the collection, much of which is not now available to the public, to be rotated



space at Powerhouse Parramatta will be "conditioned to museum standards", management says.

The Australian Institute of Conservation of Cultural Materials warns against mixing uses across the museum front and back of house, saying it risks contaminating the collection with food, pests and wastes.

The institute's NSW president, Alayne Alvis, says it was concerning that no one with long-time museum experience was present on the international design jury.

"The lack of anyone to speak for the needs of a museum in this process would indicate that this process is not committed to creating a museum that

21-6-20
SW HERALD

will be Sydney's first example of a 21st-century cultural institution, drawing record numbers of visitors to the city's second CBD. The difference is one of philosophy, she says: the past versus the future, traditional museum practices versus contemporary.

Last week thousands of documents were made public by parliamentary order of upper house members David Shoebridge and Robert Borsak ahead of a fresh inquiry into the \$1.17 billion relocation - the same select committee that urged the Powerhouse stay in Ultimo and western Sydney be given its own institution.

Together the documents show, in

Powerhouse will open with no permanent collection on display, no dedicated spaces for museum exhibitions and no on-site permanent storage for its vast collection.

The collections team will be based at the museum's Discovery Centre at Castle Hill, which is to be expanded for the museum's 500,000 collection items and is where exhibitions will be built.

As many as 2 million people are predicted to visit in its first year, the EIS says, driven by longer opening hours and the changing program.

These bold forecasts were informed by a market-depth analysis and modelling of the capacity for all

the collection, much of which is not now available to the public, to be rotated.

A ribbon of restaurants, shops and bars, and markets, conferences, corporate lunches and festivals, will drive commercial revenues, far exceeding the \$3 million brought in annually at Ultimo. There is, however, unlikely to be any reduced call on NSW Treasury, which supported Ultimo to the tune of \$29 million in 2018-19.

In fact, the documents make it clear that the design team has been on the hunt for savings and efficiencies - anything from the number of lifts and escalators to the \$1 million to be saved on power infrastructure.

Already compromises have been made around the public floor space of the presentation spaces. Shortlisted architects were asked to provide a minimum 15,000 square metres of presentation space - that now sits at 12,644 square metres, the EIS says.

In February the design teams discussed the relaxation of climate-controls in the presentation spaces from museum standards to a proposed category of comfort AC

[airconditioning], documents show. Exhibition spaces need to be controlled for temperature, humidity, dust and light, with air, water vapour, dust, pollutants and pests contributing to the deterioration of museum objects.

Moist air encourages mould and the corrosion of metal. Light can cause irreversible damage to materials, including photographs and fabrics. There are various grades of climate control, AA being the gold standard at which world museums will make loans. Ninety per cent of the total exhibition

would indicate that this process is not committed to creating a world-class museum, but having a museum as one of many changing sources of entertainment on the site."

Meanwhile, collection management and assessment expert Kylie Winkworth, an opponent of the move, says the Powerhouse's research output had crashed over the past 15 years.

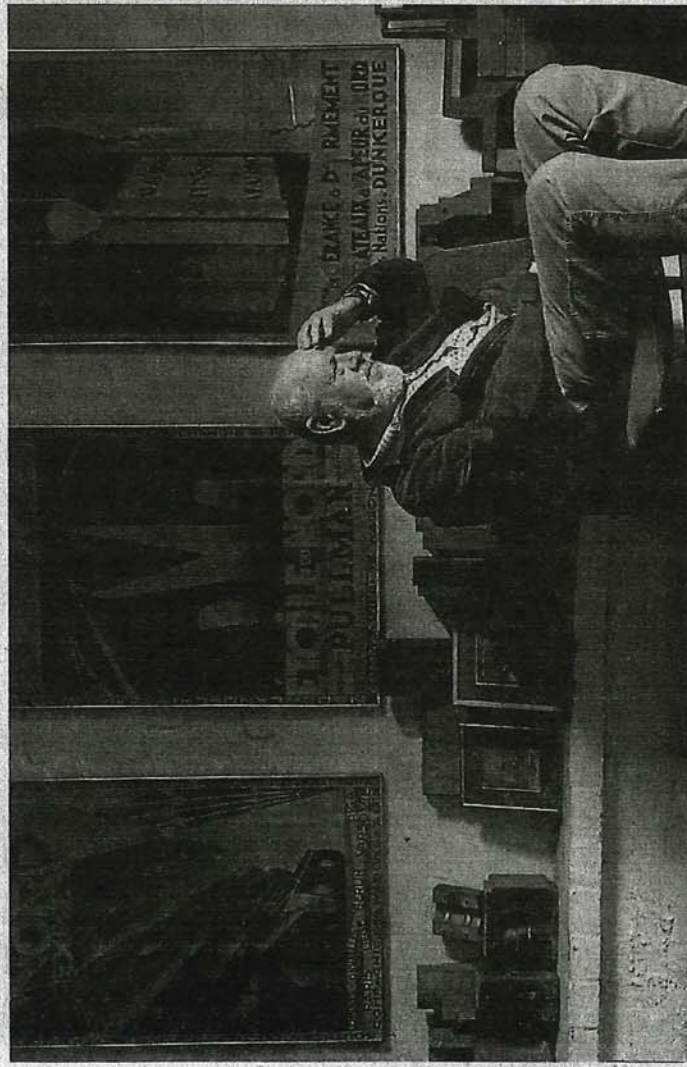
Winkworth has had 40 years' experience working with museums, collections and heritage sites.

"It's a completely porous building, open to the river, with multiple doors and access, and no foyer. And no parking whatsoever, but still with the fantasy that they will have high-rotation multiple events, performances and commercial activities, plus support for 40 apartments and a school boarding house."

The Trust of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences has a legal mandate to protect and preserve its collections while sharing them with the public. Its chairman, Professor Barney Glover, the vice-chancellor of Western Sydney University, is confident Havilah's vision will deliver a cultural institution in Parramatta that will sit at the forefront of museum design and function globally.

"The public will have access to more of the vast Powerhouse collection than ever before both in Parramatta and the expanded Museum Discovery Centre at Castle Hill - this is an excellent arts and cultural outcome for western Sydney but in fact for all of NSW," he says. "The Trust has full confidence that the MKG design ... will ensure the safety and protection of the Powerhouse Collection."

Architect and heritage consultant



Bruce Lay is among those questioning if he should donate his rare and valuable posters, classics from the 1920s by A.M. Cassandre to the Powerhouse. "They belong in a national institution either in Sydney or Canberra; not buried because of irrelevance, in storage in Parramatta. If the Powerhouse goes, we will re-assign the gift."

Lay's friend the late Werner Adamek bequested his collection of Navaho rugs to the Powerhouse some decades ago. "What will be their fate?" Lay asks.

Sydney has to wait until 2024 to see the physical results of the planning under way for western Sydney's Powerhouse. The brief to architects references some of the most iconic cultural buildings in the world, including: the Turbine Hall of the Tate



The new design for the Powerhouse.

Modern; The Shed Arts Centre, New York; Shanghai's Powerstation of Art, and the Grand Palais Paris. Each are renowned for interpreting arts and culture for new, often younger, audiences. Each at the forefront of new thinking around the management and display of collections, looking at ideas to bring the city into exhibition halls, even tossing out traditional chronological hangings. Havilah wants the Powerhouse to be a similar disruptor.

The brief to architects referred to some of the world's most iconic buildings for inspiration, including a space for large-scale performances, installations, arts and events created with a movable shell. There are global precedents, too, for the establishment of publicly accessible satellite archives like that foreshadowed for Castle Hill. The

Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay and London's Victoria and Albert Museum are looking at or building satellite storage solutions that may be partially open to the public.

An animation by MKG hints at what is to come: scenes shift from fashion show to gallery, to lecture hall to children's playground and outdoor concert, and research labs, a public domain that is active day and night.

It silenced staff early this year. This was not the vision of a stand-alone museum they had hoped for. There will be no compromise, Havilah says. "I have spent my career working in western Sydney arts and culture and I know first-hand the appetite in the community for greater access to arts and culture where people live.

"We won't just see people return visit to the Powerhouse Parramatta once; we'll have people returning regularly as our changing exhibition program educates and inspires."

The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences grew out of the blaze that levelled the Garden Palace exhibition hall in the Royal Botanic Gardens along with some of Australia's early industrial, manufacturing and agricultural riches.

The nation's loss inspired the establishment of the museum in 1879, dedicated to the collection of Australia's material heritage and stories of Australian culture, history and lifestyle.

The Lionel Glendenning-designed galleria, which opened in 1988 in the shell of the old tramways powerhouse in Ultimo, now sits in one of the densest precincts of technological enterprise in Australia, says the Pyrmont Action Group, which still wonders why the government is ready to abandon a purpose-built museum just 30 years old.

Staff giving the last tours are asking if it has to happen: why not leave Ultimo open until there is something built in Parramatta? "Not one visitor has said they agree with the move," one says. "In fact, it is the opposite. The museum has provided visitors with beautiful, memorable experiences for literally generations, and the next generation will not have this family experience."

There have been tears from visitors and staff: "All share a common mourning. The cold and unnecessary - and preventable - death of a perfectly healthy family member."

SUN HERALD 21-6-20

Powerhouse delayed, almost \$500,000 to move train

EXCLUSIVE

Linda Morris

Construction of the Parramatta Powerhouse is unlikely to finish before 2024, three years after the Ultimo building closes, according to documents obtained by parliamentary order.

The documents also disclose that the design team has been searching for ways to install Locomotive No 1 and other oversized steam engines and aircraft from its collection in the new museum.

The Berejiklian government was forced to release thousands of documents last week around planning for the new Parramatta Powerhouse, the Ultimo creative precinct, and the fate of the museum's very large objects.

Upper House crossbenchers, including the Greens and the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party, united with Labor to enforce a call of papers ahead of new hearings into

the \$1.17 billion relocation project.

The project's timetable reveals the government is working towards ministerial approval for the new site by December, with a builder to be procured early next year and construction to wrap up sometime in 2024. The original timeline predicted a start on construction in 2019 and a grand opening in late 2023. The Powerhouse at Ultimo shuts its doors finally next July.

A feasibility study commissioned in March confirmed at least 15 of the museum's largest objects would not fit in the new building's goods lift. This includes most of its steam engine collection, including NSW's first train, railway carriages, its tram, helicopter, and the train indicator board that stood at Central Station directing passengers for 76 years.

Engineering consultants Arup Australia investigated two options to lift the heavy objects, each carrying risks.



'Farcial move':
Labor treasury
spokesman Walt
Secord Photo:
Christopher
Pearce

**Proposal
more
'pleasure
palace' than
museum**
EXTRA
PAGE 20

The first involves designing a door into the lattice facade for passage of the objects from a landing in Phillip St. This required the purchase of an overhead crane costing \$400,000 and hire of a mobile crane at a cost of \$85,000.

"While the strategy is feasible, we'd like to advise against this due to the design complexity, capital, and maintenance costs associated [with] the custom-made doors and telescopic crane," the report said.

Option two involves punching an internal void between two presentation spaces and is favoured because of the minimal impacts to traffic, public access and the museum's operations.

Labor's treasury spokesman Walt Secord said the struggle to relocate the 26-tonne locomotive showed how farcical the business of moving the Powerhouse's collection had become.

"Documents show that it will cost almost a half-million dollars to simply lift

the locomotive into the new Powerhouse. That is just crazy and shows that no due diligence was taken when they promised to relocate the locomotive.

"This would be laughable if we were not paying for this exercise during these tough economic times."

Meanwhile, delays to the Parramatta Powerhouse's opening mean that Sydney will be without the physical museum presence for two or three years.

If construction ends in 2024, a fitout is then required before doors open. That involves testing and embedding air conditioning, power, lifts and escalators.

This phase might take up to 12 months, meaning it will be 2025 before the museum opens to the public.

A spokesperson for Infrastructure NSW would only say that "a timeframe for construction will be confirmed when planning approval is received and a building contractor is appointed".

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SMH

SUN HERALD 21-6-20

Silence won't save the Powerhouse; speak up now!

COMMENT

John McDonald



It's not a museum. This is not a matter of opinion, it's not a slander being spread by critics of the project. The proposed building in Parramatta that the NSW government would like us to see as the home of a "relocated" Powerhouse Museum will be nothing more than an entertainment venue stuffed with cafes and reception areas.

The simplest online definition of a museum is: "a building in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic or cultural interest are stored and exhibited". There is no on-site storage facility in the plans for the new building, and no thought given to a permanent collection, which is the very heart of the institution.

The plan for the "New Powerhouse" reveals utterly inadequate facilities for displaying works of artistic and historical value. It will have only 25 per cent of the display area of the existing museum and will not meet the necessary minimum thresholds to allow for loans from overseas institutions. There will be retail

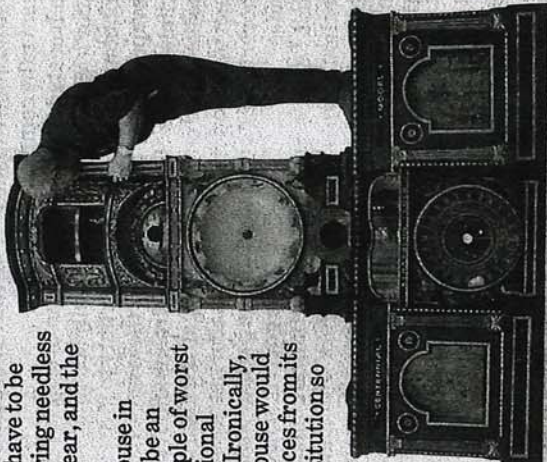
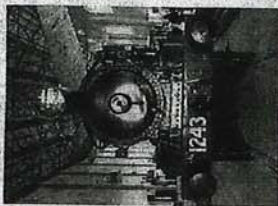
HERSCAL 2022

areas, 10 cafes and bars, but no collection storage, no conservation laboratory and only a single loading dock. The idea of "flexible" exhibition spaces means display areas will have to double up as party venues, severely limiting the kind of objects that may be shown.

The Powerhouse's permanent collection is to be exiled to existing storage facilities in Castle Hill, along with curators and other exhibition staff. Whenever displays are to be changed, items will have to be trucked over, incurring needless expense, wear and tear, and the risk of accident.

The new Powerhouse in Parramatta is set to be an embarrassing example of worst practice by international museum standards. Ironically, the current Powerhouse would not loan valuable pieces from its collection to any institution so poorly equipped.

It's been well documented that the new building is to sit on a flood plain, which makes it unsafe for the display of objects,



London, whose brief is "art and design", and the Smithsonian Institution in America, which divides its operations between 19 separate museums.

The sheer diversity of collections is staggering, assembling material from all over the world in fields that range from ceramics, glass, jewellery, costume and

and perhaps for human occupation. Hydrologist John Macintosh said to put a public building on such a site is a "crazy proposal". He has warned that if a major flood came along "people could die".

None of this has struck a chord with Premier Gladys Berejiklian, who has declared the "move" "non-negotiable". Unphased by a COVID-19 lockdown that will cost the state tens of billions of dollars she is determined to proceed with a frivolous, destructive scheme, ludicrously underpriced at \$1.1 billion.

The entire project has been veiled in secrecy. Volumes of expert reports have been ignored. The findings of inquiries have been treated with disdain. The government has either refused to disclose business plans or produced figures so hopelessly fudged that no one with the slightest knowledge of museums would take them seriously. The most laughable claims say the new Powerhouse will attract 2 million visitors a year. As the Art Gallery of NSW claimed a record 1.61 million visitors in 2018, it seems wildly optimistic to imagine Parramatta will outdraw any venue in central Sydney.

The Premier is also falling back on that old chestnut of job creation. She says 1100 temporary construction jobs will be created by the project but is

idea that the museum could be "so pointlessly and wastefully uprooted". It's hard to think of another instance in which a government has wilfully destroyed a major public asset to pursue a scheme that has Buckley's chance of success. It would be akin to the British government relocating the Victoria and

unconcerned that up to 95 jobs will be lost if she makes good on her plan to close the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo. The heritage halls of the museum are to shut on June 30, the museum's purpose-built galleries to close 12 months later.

As the new building is not due to open until 2024 or 2025, there's only one way to account for the sudden decision to close the Powerhouse. It is a cynical manoeuvre intended to capitalise on the remnant of the lockdown, a ploy to forestall a swelling tide of protest.

Remember the fig trees chainsawed to make way for the light rail straight after the government had given assurances they wouldn't be touched "for months"? The instant demolition job launched on Sydney Football Stadium, just in case the Labor Party won the election? The raft of broken promises associated with the \$17 billion WestConnex development?

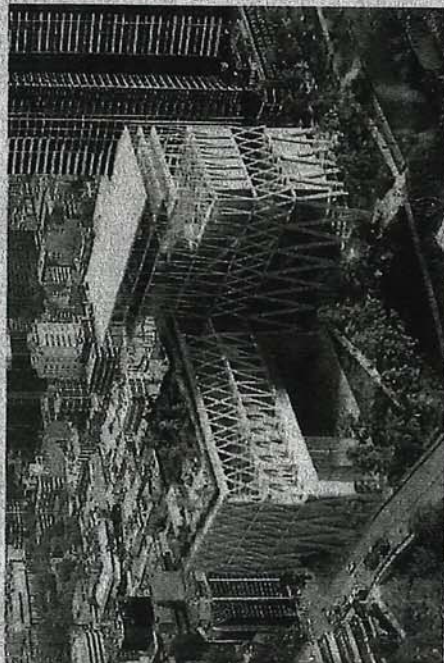
By now we know the form. Get in fast and do the dirty deed. When the damage is done, tell your critics the only option is to push on to avoid a cost blowout. The government knows that when something is irretrievably lost, such as the historic fig tree known as the Tree of Knowledge, there's nothing left to fuel protests. They are applying that logic here.

The Powerhouse Museum opened in

George's Terrace. Instead of a building that enriches the cultural life of the city, residents will see the last remaining fragments of local heritage trashed.

Somewhere along the line the cultural issues that lay at the heart of the "relocation" have been forgotten. As for the award-winning Powerhouse building

In 1916, the architect was



March 1988, but the core collection belongs to the old Technological, Industrial and Sanitary Museum, founded in 1879. Unlike the Parramatta development, the building in Ultimo - constructed on the site of a tram power station - was intended to provide adequate storage and display facilities for a collection that numbered more than 400,000 items (now more than 500,000). Architect Lionel Glendenning won the Sulman award for his design, which was a precursor of such international museum developments as Tate Modern in the former Battersea Power Station.

The Powerhouse is unique in being a museum devoted to applied arts, science and technology. Its nearest counterparts are the Victoria and Albert Museum in

From left:
Locomotive No. 1243, built in Sydney in 1882, is rolled out at the Powerhouse in 1987; the Strasburg clock; and an artist's impression of the new Parramatta Powerhouse.
Photos: Fairfax Archives, Tamara Dean

London, whose brief is "art and design", and the Smithsonian Institution in America, which divides its operations between 19 separate museums.

The sheer diversity of collections is staggering, assembling material from all over the world in fields that range from ceramics, glass, jewellery, costume and furniture to industrial design, folk art and large-scale pieces of machinery. This includes the Boulton and Watt engine, the oldest built locomotive in NSW; the Catalina flying boat, and other items for which there will be no room in Parramatta. To consider moving these things, the government would need to buy a crane. Then there is the small problem that none of them would fit into the goods lift.

The lack of adequate planning and arrogant disregard of expert warnings means most of the Powerhouse's large objects will be dumped in warehouses - or sold as a way of recouping rising costs. Expect unique pieces such as Kändler's 1739 bust of Baron Schmiedel or the Smith's Strasburg clock (1887-89) to be propped up in corners as part of a perpetual display of highlights, devoid of meaning or context.

The government's treatment of the Powerhouse Museum has astonished the international museum community. In 2018, *The Art Newspaper* noted this would be the most expensive museum relocation in history, while an editorial in *The Burlington Magazine* denounced the

idea that the museum could be "so pointlessly and wastefully uprooted". It's hard to think of another instance in which a government has wilfully destroyed a major public asset to pursue a scheme that has Buckley's chance of success. It would be akin to the British government relocating the Victoria and Albert Museum to Essex.

I've no room to recount the full, inglorious history of this project, which was raised by Mike Baird's government in 2014. The then-premier's "arts ambassador", Liz Ann Macgregor, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, called the relocation a "game changer" for western Sydney. The move was seen as a way of answering pleas for an arts complex in a densely populated, culturally neglected region. But once it was made clear such a proposal would cost possibly billions it should have been obvious that it would be cheaper and more effective to build a new arts venue there and leave the Powerhouse alone. Instead, this hair-brained scheme was adopted with no reality check.

Parramatta wanted an arts complex but the government, until recently, was committed to giving it a science museum. Now even that idea has been watered down into something closer to a recreation centre. The price Parramatta will pay for an unwanted, overgrown double milk crate will be the destruction of the Victorian heritage buildings of Willow Grove and St

George's Terrace. Instead of a building that enriches the cultural life of the city, residents will see the last remaining fragments of local heritage trashed.

Somewhere along the line the cultural issues that lay at the heart of the "relocation" have been forgotten. As for the award-winning Powerhouse building in Ultimo, the only rationale anyone has been able to offer is that deals have been done with friendly developers eager to get their hands on prime real estate.

What can be done? Nothing, if we listen to Gladys, in her best totalitarian tones. It is, in brief, an appalling act of vandalism against our cultural heritage.

There are two groups of people who must stand up now and be counted - first, Liberal voters who consider themselves genuine conservatives. Any true conservative would and should be horrified at the destruction of an important museum and its replacement by an entertainment centre. Second, members of the arts community need to get behind the campaign to save the Powerhouse. This includes directors of other cultural institutions including Liz Ann Macgregor.

We are on the verge of the greatest cultural crime in Australian history and figures of influence who sit on the sidelines should be held accountable for their silence.

John McDonald is an art critic and regular columnist with the *Herald*.

SMH 27-6-20

Powerhouse's treasures to be 'scattered', plans reveal

EXCLUSIVE

Linda Morris, Carrie Fellner

Management of the Powerhouse Museum is proposing to lend steam trains, vintage race cars, planes and trams to regional museums across the state when its Ultimo site closes.

Documents released by order of the NSW upper house show negotiations have been under way since last year to find temporary homes for some of the museum's very large objects as Sydney awaits the opening of the new Parramatta Powerhouse.

Locomotive No.1 could be moved to the NSW Rail Museum in Thirlmere from July 2021, according to an email sent last September by Julie Banks, the museum's director of curatorial, collections and exhibitions.

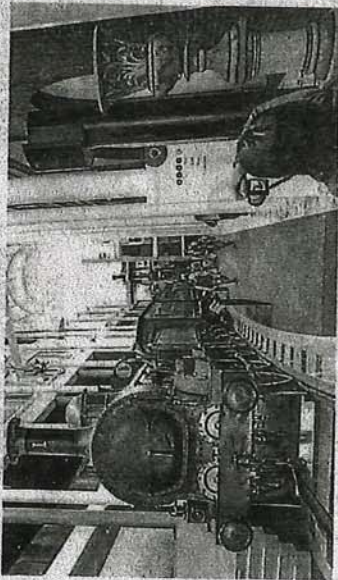
The Sydney Tramway Museum at Loftus could take Sydney's only known surviving horse-drawn trams and a Toastrack O-class tram, the most famous of all Sydney's electric trams.

The Powerhouse Museum is to close its heritage halls to public

entry tomorrow, with the rest of the museum to follow in July 2021. Lisa Havilah, the museum's chief executive officer, said booked heritage tours would continue until the end of this year due to popular demand.

Ms Havilah said the Powerhouse regional program was about giving communities access to its incredible collection during what was an exciting phase for the institution. A final plan is expected to be announced by the end of the year.

But the dispersal of the collection has prompted concern around standards for storage, display and management of the objects in regional museums and the risk of



Critics are concerned over plans to shift items such as Locomotive No.1. Photo: Dallas Kilponen

Very Large Objects, imposing artefacts of our industrial heritage which embody people's inventiveness, innovation and creativity," she said.

"This is cultural and intellectual vandalism ... Powerhouse Museum exhibitions will be disappearing by this willy-nilly act of breaking up and scattering trains, planes, stationary steam engines, space hardware, trams and automobiles across NSW."

It was unthinkable, she said, that the 1785 Boulton & Watt rotative steam engine would be stranded alone, not steam-powered, in a circulation corridor in the new Parramatta Powerhouse.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian, in her capacity as Arts Minister, and Ms Havilah did not respond to questions about the adequacy of the Parramatta facility yesterday. They declined to address suggestions the plans appear to cater to entertainment, cafes and events over exhibitions.

Labor's Walt Secord said it was not too late for the government to abandon its plans to shift the museum to Parramatta.

damage in transit. Among critics was former NSW Premier Bob Carr, who labelled the state government plans for the museum "shockingly flawed".

"I can't believe that there would be any other city in the world where a government would be dissolving a major museum collection built up and nurtured by its people over generations, to scatter and disperse its contents for all time," he said.

Jennifer Sanders, the museum's former deputy director of collections, said the museum's artefacts spoke of global industrial heritage.

"These stories will be ripped apart by dispersing the museum's

SMH Letters 28.6.20

Leo Schofield summed up how most people feel about a treasured museum being obliterated at an unknown cost to taxpayers ("Brace for cultural destruction", June 21). Just ask yourself: why do millions of people flock to visit the unique Tate Modern in London? Could it be because the collection includes a unique building - size, vast ceilings, awe-inspiring entrance? It was once a power station. The cost of reproducing a building to house a train or a plane are prohibitive. The building is as important as the collection to the history and evolution of Sydney. This is why Sydney's Powerhouse Museum must be preserved as is.

Glenda Gartrell, Artarmon

Schofield has written a powerful critique of the Powerhouse destruction saga but his attribution to the Premier of the word "boring" to describe her one and only visit there sadly says more about her than the museum. Very few of the pupils I took there, and to the nearby Maritime Museum, found them so - even if Macca's for lunch was the real highlight of the day.

Tony Sullivan, Adamstown Heights

Oh, Leo; you articulate your anguish at the destruction of the Powerhouse so well. I am speechless at the Premier's determination to push ahead with this folly. While I have read countless objections and many imploring her to think again, the only support I have ever seen for this move is from Parramatta's mayor. By all means establish a stand-alone museum in Parramatta, but please Premier, think again about the look - nay, the political folly - of such a huge and unnecessary "relocation" when there are so many far more critical areas in need of government funding in the middle of a pandemic.

Kay Buckeridge, Mosman

Premier should explain zeal for museum move

The destruction of the Powerhouse Museum and the scattering of its collection beggars belief ("Powerhouse's treasures to be 'scattered', plans reveal", June 29).

The tired old idea that it is necessary for the construction of a new museum at Parramatta does not, and never did, hold water, and in the absence of any obvious benefit, the most likely reason would seem to be the desire to fill state coffers by handing over to developers the prime real estate in Ultimo upon which the Powerhouse Museum stands. Premier Gladys Berejiklian backs this project with a zeal that really should be explained to the people of NSW. On the current government's record, the project can be expected to cost vastly more than estimated.

There are plenty of projects that would provide just as many jobs, and Parramatta can build a museum and fill it with any number of displays without destroying the Powerhouse.

Walter Hume, Castle Cove

The Premier's point-blank refusal to respond to me or anyone protesting the Powerhouse being ripped from its roots in Ultimo is a sad reminder of how little our voices count. Unions of old may have been disruptive, but oh, for another Jack Mundey.

Peter Farmer, Northbridge

Your correspondent suggests, quite rightly, that our state government should examine its

conscience over the Powerhouse debacle (Letters, June 29). Sadly, it seems the NSW LNP's conscience has already been boxed up and sent to Parramatta - in a very small box.

Phil Bradshaw, Naremburn

The more we read about this move, the more it is obvious that it is just about real estate and what money can be made from it. Not only will we be losing such a wonderful museum, but the character of this part of the city, once home to many factories that told the story of our once-vibrant manufacturing industry, will be diminished even more.

Mary Lawson, Marrickville

If they haven't already, I hope that letter writers will send equally passionate letters to the

Powerhouse Environmental Impact Statement. Public submissions end on July 7, so let your disgust be heard before it is too late.

Patricia Dunn, Gerringong

It's not too late, Premier, to reverse the tragic decision to close the Powerhouse Museum. The Royal Society of NSW deplored the original decision to move the museum to Parramatta, believing the museum in its present location is a priceless resource for the city and the state, and that Parramatta deserves a new cultural institution. Please halt this tragic destruction of a cultural icon before it is too late.

Professor Ian H. Sloan, president, Royal Society of NSW

SMH Letters 29.6.20 Shifting Powerhouse is a lose-lose proposition

John McDonald's detailed expose of the venal plan to move the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta clearly details the shallowness of this lose-lose proposition ("Silence won't save the Powerhouse; speak up now!", June 27-28). It will destroy the museum in any practical sense and Parramatta will see the last vestiges of its Victorian cultural heritage torn down for a tasteless recreation centre. And we, the taxpayers, will foot the bill. There are so many bad angles to this plan. What possible motivation can there be for Gladys Berejiklian to carry it through, except to keep sweet with the only winners: the developers waiting to get their hands on prime Ultimo real estate.

Jeff Donovan, Bernagui

McDonald makes a powerful argument for saving the museum. There's also an educational perspective: when my kids were little, their favourite outing was to the Powerhouse. They loved the interactive games that taught scientific principles and were fascinated by the historical items showing humanity's innovation. My son has gone on to university maths and computer science and has started research in artificial intelligence. It's mystifying that the NSW government should be closing this down at the same time as the Australian government is radically changing university fees to promote STEM courses for

"jobs of the future". We need to inspire kids at age eight, not bribe them at 18.

Kevin Fell, Cooks Hill

McDonald's article gives voice to my outrage. This protest is not a cause just for lefty progressives: where are the historians, art lovers and conservatives? Relocation of the Powerhouse is reminiscent of the near-destruction of The Rocks in the 1960s, a historical area almost destroyed but now much valued and an important icon of Sydney. What's next? Move the Museum of Contemporary Art? The harbourside location could make a wonderful hotel.

Shirley Cameron, Birchgrove

Is this another case of a government selling a site to developers and justifying its decision solely on the basis that it will boost treasury coffers? The government should examine its consciences and ask: what will it profit NSW if it gains millions but forfeits its soul?

Nan Howard, Camden

It's a shame that McDonald marred his otherwise excellent case for saving the Powerhouse Museum by resorting to blind hyperbole. Calling the government's project "the greatest cultural crime in Australian history" overlooks the destruction of Indigenous culture.

Janet Burstall, Lilyfield