

Re: Alterations and Additions to President Private Hospital
Applicant: Macquarie Health Corporation Limited
Application No: SSD-10320

In June 2020 Graham Brooks of GBA Heritage was commissioned by Macquarie Health Corporation Limited to prepare a Statement of Heritage Impact for the federation home known as Hotham House at 65 Hotham Road, Gymea, which occupies part of the site of President Private Hospital, and which Macquarie Health intends to demolish during its upgrade of the hospital facilities.

In this statement GBA Heritage refers to the Heritage Assessment prepared in March 2019 by Jennifer Hill of Architectural Projects for Sutherland Shire Council, which confirmed that the house and its setting met the threshold for listing as a Heritage Item in the Council's Local Environmental Plan. As a result of Council's acceptance of this assessment, the house appears as an item of local significance in the Sutherland Shire Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2015 at Schedule 5, Environmental Heritage, identified as Item 1510.

Ms Hill drew on a wide range of primary and secondary source documents, oral histories and individual submissions by qualified, knowledgeable and experienced local historians in preparing her report. It is important that Department assessors, in considering the GBA Heritage document (hereafter, "GBA"), simultaneously read the original full and thoroughly-referenced Architectural Projects report (hereafter "AP"). It will be apparent that the conclusion to support heritage listing outlined in the AP assessment is amply supported by references to reliable source material, whilst the GBA report, in seeking to minimise or deny the heritage significance of Hotham House on behalf of its client, fails to supply similar supporting evidence or proofs of the claims made therein.

To access AP visit <https://jointheconversation.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/Sutherland-Shire-Local-Environmental-Plan-2015-Proposed-local-heritage-listing-of-65-Hotham-Road-Gymea/widgets/251210/documents> and download the file "Heritage Assessment Review 65 Hotham Road Gymea by Architectural Projects".

It is impossible to consider the GBA statement without reference to this original AP assessment. An intimate knowledge of the history of the Sutherland Shire and the purpose and intent of the Holt-Sutherland Estate Land Company in releasing acreages for lease to early settlers is integral to understanding the significance of Hotham House. Unfortunately, GBA's ignorance of this history results in numerous incorrect assumptions and the appearance of fallacious and misleading claims in its report. Its most serious fallacies cannot go unchallenged.

AP concluded that Hotham House met the threshold for heritage listing on several criteria (all predictably, but erroneously, challenged by GBA) but the most serious of the latter's errors must be corrected.

Criterion A: Historic Significance ("associations with a significant activity or historical phase")

For its associations with the development of the economically important industry of poultry farming in the LGA; as homestead on a one-time 20 acre holding, the house stands as a pointer from Gymea's and the Shire's 21st century suburban setting back to its 19th century rural roots; for its ability to illustrate a way of life in the interwar period.

GBA claims "the terminology 'homestead' is incorrect and suggests a rural property" and that "the original 5 acre lot [on which the house was built] was not rural development". **False.**

The Holt-Sutherland Estate Land Company sold the leasehold (and after 1901, the freehold) on these 5 acre lots for tenants/owners to establish holdings on which to become self sufficient and/or sell the produce raised. "It seems to be an understood thing that in three years of honest, hard work an industrious man may here make a home, with garden, orchard, poultry, bees, cow, pigs, &c., and which, if fairly managed, will give him a good living" (*The Australian Star*, 18 Oct 1893, p 3). "Fruit, vegetables, flowers, and poultry are the main products of the settlers ... few parts of New South Wales are better adapted for the cultivation of stone-fruits, vegetables, flowers, and poultry breeding" (*The Sydney Mail*, 21 Feb 1906, p 467) Contemporary observations like these

describe the district's early rural environment and activities; orchards, vineyards, market gardens, dairies, slaughter yards and poultry farms occupied the 5 acre blocks into which most of the 13,000 acre Holt-Sutherland Estate was divided, and Albert and Isabella Tildesley, who built Hotham House, were amongst those who purchased multiple adjoining blocks on which to develop larger commercial enterprises.

In 1918, as a witness at the NSW Legislative Assembly's Select Committee hearings on the proposed Sutherland Water Supply Bill, Albert Tildesley testified that he had lived at his Sutherland Shire property for five years, was at that time holding 15 acres on both leasehold and freehold bases and running 2000 head of poultry, that all of the land surrounding his was also comprised of five acre blocks, that some were bushland but most were poultry farms, and that there were no nearby subdivided building lots. When asked if the water scheme were carried out, would he subdivide his own 15 acres, Tildesley replied in the negative, saying "My present intention is to increase my stock of poultry and go in for a larger farm". (*Report from the Select Committee on the Sutherland Water Supply Bill Together with the Proceedings of the Committee and Minutes of Evidence*, Govt Printer 1918).

AP notes that "Hotham Farm represents the most successful primary industry in the district – a landmark business of local and state importance". GBA asserts "there is no documentary evidence to support this claim". **On the contrary**, ample evidence exists in the form of contemporary newspaper reports and records held by descendants and employees, of the scale, productivity, success and innovations developed by Tildesley and subsequent owners Frederick Turner and Joseph King (who added duck production to the operation). The footnotes and bibliographical references contained in AP appear to have been ignored by GBA.

Criterion B: Historic Association Significance ("is associated with a significant event, person or group of persons")

The house has important historic associational significance through the associations with Hotham Farm, and with Albert Tildesley, and later owners Frederick Turner and Joe King; Hotham Farm was at one time the largest poultry farm in the state; Turner and King made significant advances in poultry farming during their tenure.

GBA claims that "the evidence that Hotham Farm was the largest farm in the state has not been substantiated ... there were many poultry farms in the surrounding areas of Sutherland and GyMEA, including several to the north in Hotham Road ... the advances made by the subsequent owners ... did not take place in the subject house". **Incorrect/misleading.**

Indeed, there were many poultry farms in the surrounding area; as AP notes, poultry farming was the most successful and economically important industry in the early, struggling days of the district. However, no other local farms were of the scale and sophistication of Hotham Farm. Reference to land records (leases and certificates of title) and to historic aerial photographs of the LGA, showing land boundaries, bears this out.

Albert Tildesley, as president of the NSW Poultry Farmers' Association, frequently travelled interstate to advise other associations and farmers on the methods and technology he pioneered on his Hotham Poultry Farm. By its peak in the mid 1920s the farm is frequently referred to in press reports as being the largest in the state. "Mr A.H. Tildesley, President of the New South Wales Poultry Farmers' Association, and owner of the Hotham Poultry Farm, Sutherland, the largest poultry farm in that State, has been visiting Adelaide" (*The Register [SA]*, 26 Feb 1926). "The Hotham poultry farm, at Sutherland, near Sydney, N.S.W., owned and managed by Mr. A. H. Tildesley, is probably one of the best, if not the best, equipped establishments of this kind in Australia" (*The South-Western News [WA]*, 29 Jan 1926, p 5). Numerous reports in the general and trade press of the 1920s describe at length the specific experiments carried out and techniques developed by Tildesley at Hotham Farm, which he readily shared with fellow producers, for the benefit of the industry as a whole.

In 1930 a branch of the Poultry Farmers' Union was formed at nearby Miranda and Frederick Turner, the second owner of Hotham House and Farm, was elected its first president and Miranda's representative on the NSW Union's executive committee. The following year he became president of the NSW Union. Like Albert Tildesley, Frederick Turner was a significant and active

figure in the industry pursued on the property. He was a regular and successful exhibitor at poultry shows, and was responsible for the establishment of the White Campbell duck breed, bred from a white “sport” discovered in a hatch amongst his Khaki Campbells. (*The Farmer and Settler*, 25 Oct 1930, p 3; 28 Nov 1931, p 8; 9 May 1947, p 16).

GBA engages in a semantic exercise in claiming that the technological advances made by Tildesley, Turner and King did not occur *inside the house* itself but on the farmland surrounding it. Hotham House, as the only remaining evidence of the farm’s existence, justifies its heritage listing by virtue of it being the homestead situated on that farm (and the dwelling place of these prominent industry figures) and its association with their groundbreaking activities.

Criterion D: Social Significance (“is important to a community’s sense of place”)

The house has social significance at a local level, and is remembered well by many older residents, because of its former uses and rarity; the history of the building has been recorded in historic society publications.

GBA challenges these assertions on the basis that “the only documentary evidence presented in the report is from Mick Derrey in the November 1984 issue of the Sutherland Shire Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin” and “the only evidence referred to in the report is that by Mick Derrey”.

Incorrect.

The footnotes and bibliography in AP cite, in addition to Mr Derrey’s memoirs, M. Hutton Neve’s October 1973 article “Hotham Farm and Duck Breeding”, the memoirs of neighbour and employee Jack Bouffler, and professional-standard submissions by local historians. Within the latter are found further (also footnoted) personal reminiscences of local residents, plus mainstream and social media reaction to Macquarie Health’s earliest Development Application to Council which first proposed demolition of Hotham House. Despite GBA’s reluctance to acknowledge it, AP was able to draw on a depth of source material to identify Hotham House as an item “which if damaged or destroyed would cause the community a sense of loss; and/or which contribute to a community’s sense of identity” ((*NSW Heritage Manual, Assessing Heritage Significance*))

Criterion F: Rarity

The house has rarity significance at a local level

GBA asserts “the house is apparently rare in the immediate locality of President Ave and Hotham Road, however the report illustrates a number of superior examples of housing from the early 20th century in Sutherland Shire.” **Irrelevant.**

The AP report describes some other heritage listed homes in the wider LGA but none are directly comparable with Hotham House, their similarities being confined either to period OR style OR function, rather than being comparable on all counts. There is no suggestion that those items have been assessed as “superior” examples. In any case, “a heritage item is not to be excluded on the ground that items with similar characteristics have already been entered on a statutory list” (*NSW Heritage Manual, Assessing Heritage Significance*)

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GBA claims that “detailed feasibility studies have been undertaken to test the potential for Hotham House to be retained and incorporated into the hospital project” but fails to provide examples or evidence of any such studies or plans. It suggests that “the identity and history of Hotham House, with its early associations with people and with the local poultry industry in the first half of the 20th century, can be celebrated through an interpretation programme”.

The local community finds the latter an entirely inadequate “solution” and believes Hotham House should be retained within the redevelopment plans for the hospital because:

- * The house is not in a derelict state, and has been re-purposed to great success over the last four decades, most recently as a rehabilitation centre for the hospital, whilst retaining its

historical and (necessary remedial and maintenance works notwithstanding) its architectural integrity.

- * It retains the leadlight stained glass windows, dominant roof, detailed fretwork, exposed rafters and beams, verandahs with thick square columns, brick verandah supports, roughcast exterior feature panels, numerous windows, dark timber wainscot panelling and interior mouldings so characteristic of the Federation period. The curved path and wide front lawn have also been preserved, allowing the house to present a charming, open face to the street, unobscured by later subdivisions or development.
- * More than a century old, Hotham House remains relatively unaltered, has been sympathetically maintained, is clearly recognisable as an attractive and aesthetically appealing representation of the domestic architectural style of its time, is structurally sound and capable of continued maintenance and useful purpose.
- * During the ownership of Albert Tildesley the house, particularly the ballroom, was opened to members of the Starr-Bowkett Society for balls, musical and social evenings, drawing residents of other areas of Sydney to Sutherland Shire. During the ownership of Frederick Turner the house, particularly the ballroom, was opened to the local Catholic community for functions and celebrations, positioning itself as a social focal point for nearby residents.
- * Albert Tildesley, who built the home and established the poultry enterprise around it, was a colourful early Gymea character in his activities both on and off the property. Descendants of the second family to live in and run their business from the home, the Turners, maintain strong links to the suburb and keen interest in the building's fate.
- * Long term local residents remember both the house (and the Kings, the third family of occupants) before its time as a health facility. In current residents' memories Hotham House stands as a landmark local property, part of the fabric of their own recollections and personal attachment to their home suburb.
- * Current residents are fascinated by, and highly value learning about, the suburb's history and heritage, its beginnings and development, and the recording and preservation of that history for the benefit of future generations. Reactions on social media and in the local press to the news of potential demolition of the house demonstrate the community's deep-felt commitment to the preservation of this rare link to the suburb's early years.
- * There is a widespread misconception that Gymea consisted of little other than fishermen's cottages and bayside weekenders before the advent of the railway line in 1939. In fact, the earliest settlers took up their leases from 1882 and both rustic and more substantial homes began being built soon after. One reason for contemporary ignorance of Gymea's earliest history is precisely the loss of our built heritage, where later buyers and developers possessed a less acute sense of history or understanding of the buildings' heritage value. Hotham House is significant as evidence that Gymea's history is longer and more complex than is generally understood.
- * Hotham House was "ground zero" for an enterprise that sustained — indeed, ensured — the survival of the Shire's founding settlers when so many of original owner Thomas Holt's experimental pastoral ventures failed. Poultry farming thrived, provided a viable living for Gymea's early residents, laid the foundation for the suburb's future prosperity, and represents a pivotal era in the suburb's history.
- * The house is thus significant as being representative of a landmark industry in the suburb's and the Shire's development, and as home to a landmark business within a landmark industry. All three owners of the house — Albert Tildesley, Frederick Turner and Joseph King — were important figures in the early history of the poultry industry in Sutherland Shire, NSW and Australia. All three developed new techniques and employed innovative methods to improve the quality of production and advance the progress of the industry, and disseminated them to other producers (particularly Tildesley and Turner through their leading roles with the NSW Poultry Farmers' Association).

- * The house is a rare and important exemplar of Gymea's early 20th century built environment. It is Gymea's last remaining intact, substantial, Federation-period brick home and retains its architectural integrity, both internally and externally, extending to its front landscaping with circular entry path, lawn and tree placement. By retaining this open street frontage, lawns and path, the house is easily recognisable when seen in historic photographs which place it in its original rural and farming context.
- * Most other Gymea homes of the period were lost in earlier, less enlightened times, robbing the local community of the opportunity to enjoy — and experts in various fields of the opportunity to study — the tangible links these homes provided to our early settlers and producers.

As an historic, heritage-listed home which has already been successfully re-purposed as a community facility, Hotham House must be preserved and celebrated as an example of how our built heritage can continue to contribute to the community without sacrificing its original historic and architectural integrity.