

1.  
**SUBMISSION**

**POWERHOUSE AT PARRAMATTA**

**My connections with the Parramatta District**

I lived in the central CBD of Parramatta for 3 years and within the Parramatta district for a further period of 23 years (26 years in total from 1981 to 2007)

I taught high school social science in the Parramatta district for 18 years and the Penrith district for 15 years and frequently conducted school excursions to areas of Aboriginal and Second European settlements within Parramatta, including Parramatta Park and the historic precinct which includes St George's Terrace and Willow Grove.

The City of Parramatta Art Society Inc, of which I was a member, has a an annual award for painting any aspect of Parramatta. I noticed, as a member of staff at many of these exhibitions, colonial buildings dominated the subject matter presented by artists.

I have been a member of the Parramatta Leagues Club for 39 years.

**DECLARATION.**

At no time have I made any political donations, reportable or otherwise.

**I OBJECT to the Powerhouse Parramatta project**

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### **REASONS FOR MY OBJECTIONS**

#### **1. Significance of Willow Grove and St Georges Terrace to Parramatta**

*Willow Grove* is on the State Heritage Register and is considered “significant for the local area (of Parramatta) for historic, aesthetic and representativeness reasons.... It is a good example of a Victorian Italianate two-storey villa, readily identifiable as part of historical building stock and strongly contributing to the streetscape (of Phillip St).” [Source; *Old Parramatta* web site]

*Willow Grove's* significance in women's history as maternity hospital between the 1920s and 1950s is also important as is the fact that many citizens who were born there still survive to this day.

*St George's Terrace* also listed on the State Heritage Register, which notes... “it's significance for the Parramatta Local Government Area for historical and aesthetic reasons, of modest Victorian period terraces constructed during an early wave of development in the area. This line of houses has a relatively high degree of integrity when viewed from the street and strongly contributes to the Phillip St, streetscape and the character of the Parramatta township, additionally in unison with other historic buildings nearby.” [ Source: *Old Parramatta* web site Both buildings are rare examples of architecture that no longer exist anywhere else in the Parramatta CBD. Overall cumulative impacts of further heritage destruction in Parramatta currently been undertaken, make *Willow Grove* and *St George's Terrace* vital to retain for communities' sense of place. ·

What is immediately significant is that both *Willow Tree* and *St George's Terrace* have been able to survive the ravages of successive waves of development over the past 150 years in Parramatta. For example, the Barry Wilde Bridge (constructed in 1975) was planned to by-pass *Willow Grove*, rather than run through it. This is but one example of the far-sightedness of Parramatta's civic leaders of the past.

After 150 years it is apparent that this current state Government cannot, unlike its predecessors (both Local and State), find any other way but to expediently rid our nation of an irreplaceable part of our heritage and supplant its whole precinct with such an inappropriately sited structure as the proposed new Powerhouse Museum !

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## 2. Significance of Parramatta's Aboriginal and European history to the social fabric of this unique city

As a resident of the Parramatta District for 26 years,(between 1981 and 2007), I became aware of the pride that Parramatta took in being known as the nation's Second (European) Settlement. Parramatta also recognises its history from an Aboriginal perspective, the Darug tribe being the original inhabitants.

Parramatta's famous Eels NRL club incorporates an Indigenous figure as its logo, as does the Parramatta City Council.

The Darug people provide a living link to their Aboriginal ancestors which go back between thirty and forty thousand years (according to the findings of excavations made at Parramatta). Areas of Parramatta such as Parramatta Park were thriving Indigenous areas because of the abundance of easy-to-gather resources and still have evidence of middens and debarked trees used for canoes.

Parramatta's civic leaders continue to promote the tourist potential of the area in terms of its precious colonial era precincts and buildings as well as the Parramatta Riverside walk which is dedicated to Aboriginal history. Australia's first farm was created at Parramatta (Parramatta Park being a remnant) and it virtually saved the infant colony from starvation. Parramatta's roots are therefore historically rural (both Aboriginal and European) rather than industrial, and an industrial themed museum is therefore historically incongruous. Parramatta's story has always been about three elements,

1. pre Settlement Indigenous nations
2. the Second (European) Settlement (after Sydney Cove) and,
3. Indigenous/European coexistence and its, sometimes, unsettled history.

**Parramatta and its environs are the real museum**, and, with Government encouragement, can remain permanently on display without 'airbrushing out' the colonial elements of this history (such as the planned demolition of *Willow Grove* and *St George's Terrace*).

[A small minority of people would like to downplay the significance of our colonial past and, because these buildings are synonymous with the Second Settlement period, they think they are expendable.]

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However, the Second Settlement is an unalienable part of the history of not just Parramatta but the whole of Australia, and, not just part of our European history but our Indigenous history as well.

**All aspects of our history are important and should be remembered and preserved.**

Other countries are tolerant of those seeking to celebrate past attempts at invasion of their territory.

For instance,

- i. India still maintains many monuments which are remainders of British occupation, including areas of conflict such as the Residency at Lucknow.
- ii. the annual pilgrimage by Australians to Gallipoli, a place that could be views by Turkey as site of invasion, is permitted by the Turkish Government.

The NSW Government needs to be as historically sensitive to this issue as those governments of India and Turkey obviously are.

**3. Why the Parramatta Powerhouse plan is flawed.**

The government's patronising political spin doctors' rhetoric would have the public believe the plan is for a world class museum. However, any independent and openly conducted business case would find that it is not 'fit for the purpose' (ie, housing of and displaying of industrial hardware as its core business) in a famously historic (Aboriginal and European settlement) area.

As John McDonald stated in his article *New Powerhouse not a museum but a global 'embarrassment'* (Sydney Morning Herald 27<sup>th</sup> June 2020), "[this] appalling act of vandalism against our cultural heritage, is being enacted at the whim of a small lobby group. Its multi-billion bill is ludicrously under-priced at \$1.13 billion but, we may expect the final bill to push up closer to \$3 billion.[if the government's other projects, such as the light rail and WestConnex are any indication]. This private extravagance will be met by those groups the NSW government are now neglecting to assist..... such as those tax-payers struggling because of the bushfires or COVID-19 or public servants who have been impacted by the government's pay freeze."

The opportunity cost of the building such an exorbitantly large structure far outweighs any perceivable benefits to the communities of Parramatta and the rest of NSW. Only private operators stand to benefit but even they would find it difficult to profitably match the 900,000 (2018-19) visits that the Ultimo Powerhouse was achieving.

There are many far more deserving recipients, all competing for scarce government funding...education and school buildings, railways (both city, regional and country lines), social services, health, law and order, environment, bushfire victims' funding, regional and country roads and so on.

5. Do the citizens of Parramatta really want a massive Industrially Themed Museum 'dumped' onto their historic precinct?

Recently, the Premier publicly defended her Government's decision to proceed with the demolition of *Willow Grove and St George's Terrace*, by asking, "why should Parramatta be deprived of [the chance of having] a world class museum" ?

In answer to this.... if the people of Parramatta were to have been a given the choice of having either a world class Powerhouse Museum or the Bankwest Stadium built in their city, the stadium would have been their overwhelming first choice. Thanks to the NSW Government the people of Parramatta now have that, and it's by far the best football stadium in NSW, something no other football club nor fan base area is ever likely to get.

As a member of Parramatta League club for 39 years I know the passion the Parramatta club has for its NRL team.

4. **An Alternative Museum Plan for Parramatta**

If Parramatta is to have some form of themed museum, it should ;

- i. Be scaled down in size ( The announcement that the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo will now remain open means that there longer any need for the colossal building that is planned anyway.)
- ii. be about Parramatta's proudly unique history, which suggests a building

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on a much less grand scale than that proposed.

- iii. be built on the riverfront but to the east of Parramatta's core historic precinct, where parcels of vacant land exist near the ferry service. I suggest a small portion of land on the corner of Harris and George Streets on the north east corner next to Robin Thomas Reserve and adjacent to the ferry wharf.
- iv. act not only as the gateway to the living museum of Parramatta 'town', but generate the tourist interest in seeing it via a sensitively presented display of aboriginal and colonial artefacts and history. Its major sources of income would be from arranged tours and some food and beverage outlets. Parramatta does not need another 'eat street' style experience, nor the expensive merchandising outlets that the planned museum obviously would have needed to maintain its inflated size.

The building would also be a perfect venue to initiate each year the Warami festival which celebrates and commemorates Indigenous culture in Parramatta.

## **5. Final Comments**

The NSW Government's plan to turn the Second Settlement into the 'second city' after Sydney, does not need such wastefully exorbitant expenditure on the scale of the planned museum. A city is built on tradition, and historic structures which are unique to the 'culture' of this city, are perennially and intergenerationally tangible reminders of this tradition. *Willow Grove* and *St George's Terrace* are virtually the last opportunity for Parramatta City to capture and retain this tradition for future generations.

Major cities do not automatically translate into having to prove themselves by having everything "big". The major attractions of a city include its tangible heritage. Chinatown in Singapore is a classic example of a preserved historic area containing colonial era buildings which attract visitors far in excess of the windswept canyons of modern skyscrapers that exist in Singapore's financial district.

Any change in NSW Government policy which leads to the retention of *Willow Grove* and *St George's Terrace* should not be viewed as a political defeat by this Government. Instead, the Coalition Government would be praised by responsible commentators and the public at large for reversing a policy that was found to be, overall, not in the best interests of the community, both in the existing sense and for the future.

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