

21 July, 2020

Subject: Comments on the Powerhouse Parramatta Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a State Significant Development Application under Part 4 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act).

From: Ian Stephenson

I have worked in the museum field in Australia for over thirty years including for Local Government (Liverpool City Council); State Government where I was the Director of Historic Places, ACT; not for profits where I was the Senior Curator of the National Trust (NSW) and the CEO of the National Trust for South Australia; and in the university sector where I managed the cultural collections of the University of New England. I have a strong interest in, and knowledge of, the history and culture of Parramatta and Western Sydney.

While I support the government's initiative to create a major museum in Parramatta, the Parramatta Powerhouse concept is fatally flawed. This is because it is based on creating a decontextualized museum and inserting it into two high rise buildings, rather than investing in well considered infrastructure which will use Parramatta's unique identity embodied in its buildings, landscapes, and collections to tell stories of State, National and International interest.

In planning a major State funded museum in Parramatta a thorough analysis of the role, purpose, and underpinning philosophy of the museum was needed. Unfortunately, this did not occur, instead the simplistic and naïve idea that the Ultimo Powerhouse should be relocated to Parramatta was treated as a given. The scheme has many weaknesses, some of which I deal with below. The government's recent, wise, decision to retain the Ultimo site as a museum, and the green ban on the demolition of Willow Grove and St George's terrace provide an ideal opportunity to review the museum and make it more effective.

The new museum in Parramatta needs to develop and integrate the city's unique cultural assets to create an aggregated multi-sited museum. To do otherwise is wasteful, destructive and misses the opportunities for place making as envisaged in A Metropolis of Three Cities - the Greater Sydney Region Plan.

Why an aggregated museum based on place?

Parramatta is a nationally significant. Its landscape, buildings, collections, and documented history combine in a rich way to tell the stories of its people from ancient times to the present.

Its modern history dates from 1788 (the year the First Fleet reached Sydney Cove) when the British, the first of a long line of immigrants, established a farm and village on Darug land.

Through good fortune the original site of the town, the governor's domain, became a public park, leaving the Darug landscape and its colonial overlays legible despite being in the heart of a modern city. In contrast the 1788 topography of central Sydney was buried by a mountain of masonry long ago.

In its first decade Parramatta was more populous than Sydney. It retained its influential position in the nascent Australia into the first half of the 19th century.

Many of the defining events which shaped the character of our nation including agriculture, education, science and, most importantly the way the first peoples, the Darug interacted with transplanted cultures, not only occurred in Parramatta but have left a tangible record in Parramatta's buildings, landscapes and collections. **The tangible provides a unique springboard for artists, writers, intellectuals and the community to engage with, and celebrate what it means to be Australian.**

The history is rich and surprising. Maria Locke (ca 1805-1878) of the Boorooberongal clan of the Darug people was enrolled at the Parramatta Native Institution in 1814 and used the white-man's knowledge she acquired there to obtain land. At a time when women were denied opportunities for public life Mrs Macquarie shaped the landscape and buildings of the town. One of her guests at Government House observed *Mrs Macquarie would rather be the Governor than the Governor's wife!* Miss Eliza Walsh followed her example and had Governor Macquarie's ruling that single women could not receive land grants overturned. In 1822 astronomer Carl Rumker's work at the Parramatta Observatory proved the calculations for the return of Encke's comet. This was the second periodic comet to be discovered, Halley's being the first. These are but a few examples of the way history and place in Parramatta connect to bigger stories.

While the centre of power shifted east to the port, Parramatta’s seminal role in shaping the Australian identity continued to be acknowledged. **For almost a hundred and fifty years its place as the cradle city of Australia has been central to its identity. It is an evolving story which embraces the continuum of change.**

Parramatta City Council has developed a Cultural Plan based on extensive consultation with the local community. It identifies clear objectives for Parramatta’s cultural development including:

Indigenous

Our place is deeply significant for Aboriginal people and sits at the heart of cultural and social engagement. Reconciliation is vital to our identity and role as a place of gathering and influence nationally and internationally.

Historic Places

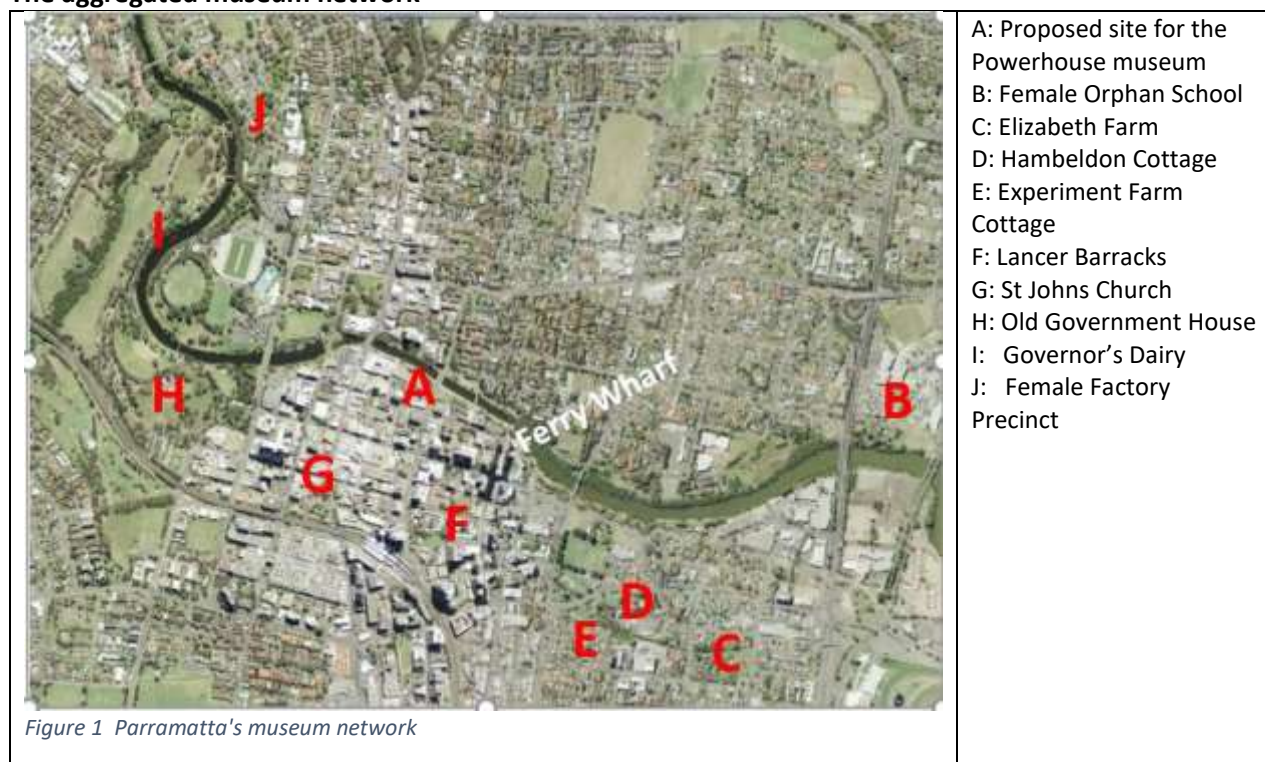
Our City is home to historic sites of national and global significance. In the midst of a new contemporary, cosmopolitan City we need to anchor, promote and share this World Heritage for our local and national community. As the first seat of government, our built environment features some of the Australia’s most important colonial buildings, peppered throughout our City’s changing landscape. More than the architecture, these heritage assets tell a story of the past and help us better understand our future.

An Iconic Museum for our City

The Parramatta community support the creation of a major museum which will be an integrated element of Parramatta’s cultural infrastructure.

Rather than a decontextualized exhibition and function centre, as envisioned in Powerhouse Parramatta, this should be a new kind of museum, designed to capitalise on Parramatta’s cultural strengths. It must be a place based museum which creates exhibitions and delivers programs using the *extraordinary built, natural and intangible cultural heritage in the City of Parramatta, from the First Peoples to the most recent arrivals to research and share the complex story of power, politics, trauma and transformation which is the city’s history.* Parramatta’s history is the history of our country in microcosm. The remarkable ensemble of buildings and landscapes, which miraculously survive in the heart of Australia’s greatest city, have immense potential to engage Australian and international audiences and stimulate creativity.

The aggregated museum network



Parramatta's museums are located on the eastern and western sides of the CBD and are linked by the Parramatta River. Foreshore walking paths currently exist between from the Fleet Street precinct to Parramatta Park and Harris Park. An extension to site B, the Female Orphan School at Western Sydney University is proposed. The route of the light rail also will connect the museums and fulfil the need for an east/west transport link through the city.



Figure 2 The route of the Parramatta light rail which is currently under construction

The aggregated museum network is strong on the perimeters of the CBD but weak in the centre. This is problematical in creating a connected museum experience. An orientation centre is needed to explain the various offerings in the aggregated model and improve the linkage between the component museums. It should include exhibitions as tasters and introductions for the distributed network and have access to the parts of the MAAS collection which have direct relevance to Parramatta (refer to Appendix A). From a cultural tourism perspective it would be best located at the ferry wharf because the journey by river from Circular Quay is a heritage tourism experience in its own right, however on arrival visitors are confronted by a drab environment which offers kittle encouragement to explore the city and visit its museums.



Figure 3 The Charles St Wharf is an unprepossessing introduction to the city



Figure 4 Augustus Earle, *Meeting of the Tribes*, 1826 and the same spot today. See Figure 5 item G

The 1817 towers of St John's Church were one of Elizabeth Macquarie's many architectural projects. The juxtaposition of Augustus Earle's 1826 painting of the annual Meeting of the Tribes, highlights the special connections between place, collections, documentation and Australia's social formation – in this case first contact, conflict and displacement.



Figure 5 Rath Yatra Hindu Festival at Old Government House, 2018. Old Government House is the oldest public building in Australia and one of three which date from the 18th century, all are in Parramatta. In 2018 the BAPS Swaminarayan Rose Hill Mandir held Rath Yatra at Old Government House in recognition of early colonial connections between India and NSW. See Figure 5 item H



Figure 6 Elizabeth Farm, Australia's oldest house. See Figure 5 item C



Figure 7 Experiment Farm Cottage the site of Australia's first land grant, image by Sardaka. See figure 5 Item E



Figure 8 The 1813 Female Orphan School, now part of the University of Western Sydney and home to the Margaret Whitlam Gallery and the Whitlam Institute's permanent exhibition A Changing Australia. **Figure 5 item B**



Figure 9 The 1798 Diary Cottage, Parramatta Park. **Figure 5 item I**



Figure 10 The construction of the high rise school allowed for the demolition of non-heritage listed buildings thereby reopening the vista of the 1818 Lancer Barracks from Macquarie Street. **See Figure 5 item F**



Figure 11 The surviving wings of the 1820 Female Factory. Figure 5, item J

The Female Factory includes a range of structures from all stages in the history of the women's prison including surviving wings from the first building which was designed by Francis Greenway. This site was cherished by the traditional owners the Darug. It is where Arthur Phillip, searching for fertile farms lands to feed the colony, camped just 4 months after the first fleet landed in Camp Cove. Later over 5000 convict women from the British Isles went through the Parramatta Female Factory. It is a place which shaped our nation. Tragedy, courage, grief, creativity and triumph over adversity are all abundant here.

If sympathetically reinterpreted and re-developed this huge site could become Australia's equivalent of Colonial Williamsburg but with one unique advantage- it is all real, all still there physically and historically and not some modern confection channelling the past. A wonderful, undisturbed happenstance waiting to bloom again as the centre of our early cultures and our manifest evolution into a culturally diverse region and creative city.

This is a rare opportunity to create a cultural legacy for future generations which will bring together the celebration of indigenous and colonial history with contemporary creativity for the first time in Australia. A tangible, lasting reflection of reconciliation.

NPRAG's (the North Parramatta Residents Action Group) have developed a compelling and well considered vision for the Fleet Street Heritage Precinct, precinct. Its implementation should be the first-priority of the State Government's Parramatta Museum project.

Conserving the Landscape

As stated above the survival of indigenous and first contact landscapes close to the heart of the Parramatta CBD is one of the unique cultural assets of the city. The two core landscapes are Parramatta Park and the Fleet Street precinct which adjoins it.

Parramatta Park was created in 1857 when about 100 hectares of the Governor's Domain were reserved as a park. Since then large portions of the park have been alienated, including for a school, an RSL Club and a parking area for the Parramatta Leagues Club. This process has continued with the recent rebuilding of the Parramatta Stadium. The recent transfer of the Wisteria Garden to Parramatta Park is welcome however the alienation has not ceased as an aquatic centre is to be built in the park. It would be unthinkable for the Royal Botanical Gardens and Centennial Park in the East to be whittled away for development, yet in the West the alienation of an historic park, which includes a World Heritage site at its core, continues.

Rethinking the Parramatta Museum project as a multi-sited aggregated museum should include compensation for the destruction of significant parts of Parramatta Park by the conservation of the 30 hectares Fleet Street precinct.



Figure 12 The Bankwest Stadium



Figure 13 The Aquatic Centre to be built in Parramatta Park



Figure 14 The park like setting of the Fleet St precinct should be conserved.

Why the demolition of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace is not acceptable

Parramatta's identity is based on its heritage, at the same time it is a city of the future. It is the successful layering of the old with new which will help make Parramatta a unique and desirable place. Given the imperative that key pieces of built heritage remain in the city it is essential that Willow Grove and St Georges terrace be retained

The Parramatta Powerhouse

As outlined above the museum concept has been poorly scoped. The EIS does not consider alternative options merely asserting that if the Powerhouse Museum is to be moved to Parramatta the former David Jones carpark is the best site. The project rates poorly against six of the Objects of EP & A Act and some of the criteria of the Greater Sydney Plan.

The table below reviews the project based on the Objects of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 No 203, as listed in section 1.3

Objects of the EP&A Act, Section 1.3	
Sub Section	Comments
(a) to promote the social and economic welfare of the community and a better environment by the proper management, development,	The EIS states that the project is to develop <i>a new institution [which] will deliver world-class opportunities for education and research, alongside museum exhibition space, and space for social and digital interaction and exchange.</i> ¹

¹ Ethos Urban , Powerhouse Parramatta Environmental Impact Statement, p. 8

and conservation of the State's natural and other resources	<p>The plan is to achieve this by constructing two high-rise towers which will house a decontextualized museum.</p> <p>Other options were not explored, in particular the potential to fulfill the stated objective by creating a new museum in the Fleet Street precinct and aggregating Parramatta's most significant buildings and landscapes (including UNESCO World Heritage listed buildings, landscapes and museums) as well as collections and intangible cultural heritage to create a new institution which could <i>deliver world-class opportunities for education and research, alongside museum exhibition space, and space for social and digital interaction and exchange.</i></p> <p>Developing the Fleet Street precinct and providing an aggregated museum model with a CBD orientation centre is a much richer concept, provides a stronger sense of place, accords with the Parramatta Cultural Plan, would share the cultural tourism benefits across Parramatta from Rydalmere to Westmead and includes a strategic development midway between the CBD and the Westmead Health precinct which is a major development node.</p> <p>The project has been poorly thought out and there are much better and more cost-effective alternatives. Therefore, the project does not represent proper management of the State's natural and other resources.</p>
(b) to facilitate ecologically sustainable development by integrating relevant economic, environmental and social considerations in decision-making about environmental planning and assessment	<p>The project does not consider the economic benefits from creating an aggregated multi sited museum which will realise the economic potential of the Fleet Street precinct for cultural tourism and produce greater financial returns from the existing museum investment in Parramatta.</p>
(c) to promote the orderly and economic use and development of land	<p>The project involves the allocation of substantial government funds for limited benefit when that money could be applied more effectively to the Fleet Street precinct and the aggregated museum model. Therefore, it does not promote the orderly and economic development of land.</p> <p>The EIS does establish that a tall building can be built on the carpark site. A better use of the site would be the retention of Willow Grove and St Georges Terrace and the construction of a commercial development which included an orientation centre giving a CBD presence to the aggregated museum - the Museum of NSW, with the funds saved being used to develop the Fleet Street precinct museum.</p>
(f) to promote the sustainable management of built and cultural heritage (including Aboriginal cultural heritage),	<p>The project involves the destruction of two heritage listed buildings. It also fails to recognise that Aboriginal cultural heritage strongly relates to place and that a better focus for indigenous heritage would be facilitating the interpretation of the Fleet Street landscape by the traditional custodians rather than 'showcasing' Aboriginal heritage in a decontextualized high rise museum. Therefore, the project cannot be said to promote the sustainable management of built and cultural heritage (including Aboriginal cultural heritage).</p>
(g) to promote good design and amenity of the built environment	<p>Good design is based on function. The function of the project should be to create a museum which uses Parramatta's unique buildings, landscape and history to explore what it means to be Australian through the lens of the Parramatta experience. This involves encouraging visitors to move across the landscape, not to closet themselves in a decontextualized museum located in a CBD high-rise. The project does not represent good design.</p>

<p>(j) to provide increased opportunity for community participation in environmental planning and assessment</p>	<p>The Parramatta Cultural Plan provides clear guidance for the development of the museum which is to use the <i>extraordinary built, natural and intangible cultural heritage in the City of Parramatta, from the First Peoples to the most recent arrivals to research and share the complex story of power, politics, trauma and transformation which is the city's history.</i></p> <p>The consultation component of the EIS does not include this perspective and options for modifying the museum model to include these concepts have not been explored.</p> <p>The clear message from the community is that heritage in the form of buildings, landscape and culture are central to Parramatta's identity, however the project involves the demolition of two heritage buildings and includes no analysis of its relationship with Parramatta's other heritage sites and museums except for the World Heritage listed Old Government House. Here it does not identify a synergy but merely notes that the development will not compromise Old Government House.</p>
--	---

The objectives and strategies of The Metropolis of three Cities - The Greater Sydney Development Plan set out in the table below are relevant to the proposal.

<p>Objective 9: Greater Sydney celebrates the arts and supports creative industries and innovation</p>	<p>Whilst the Parramatta Powerhouse will support the arts and the creative industries the approach is not innovative because it has no connection with Parramatta's extraordinary cultural capital of landscape, historic buildings and collections.</p>
<p>Objective 12: Great places that bring people together</p>	<p>The aggregated museum model is far richer in terms of place-making and will vitalise more of the city.</p>
<p>Objective 13 : Environmental heritage is conserved and enhanced</p>	<p>The Parramatta Powerhouse involves the destruction of heritage items. The EIS includes the self-serving justification that the demolition is warranted because the new buildings will be tomorrow's heritage.</p>
<p>Objective 28: Scenic and cultural landscapes are protected</p>	<p>The aggregated museum model celebrates Parramatta's scenic and cultural landscapes. This will help ensure they are valued and protected.</p>
<p>Strategy 13.1 Conserve and enhance environmental heritage by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaging with the community early in the planning process to understand Aboriginal, European and natural heritage values • conserving and interpreting Aboriginal, European and natural heritage to foster distinctive local places <p>Improved public access and connection to heritage through innovative interpretation is also required. A well-connected region (Objective 14), creating great places (Objective 12) and developing the Greater Sydney Green Grid (Objective 32) will improve the connectivity and accessibility of the region's heritage.</p>	<p>The Parramatta Powerhouse has been the result of top down decisions not community engagement. The aggregated museum model complements Strategy 13.1, the Parramatta Powerhouse does not.</p> <p>The Fleet Street Precinct plan involves the innovative interpretation of a nationally, and arguably internationally, significant heritage place. The aggregated museum model offers far greater connectivity than the Parramatta Powerhouse.</p>

The section entitled Directions for Liveability the Greater Sydney Development Plan illustrates why the aggregated museum model will be more effective than the decontextualized top-down approach to the Parramatta Powerhouse:

Great places recognise local characteristics and the qualities people value, Place-based planning is a design-led and collaborative way of examining the complexity of the city by viewing it as a mosaic of different places, each with unique potential and characteristics. Focusing on how specific places work for people, collaborative processes are used to develop a shared vision and values that capitalise on locally distinctive attributes and strengths.

Conclusion

The goal to provide Parramatta with *world-class opportunities for education and research, alongside museum exhibition spaces, and space for social and digital interaction and exchange* is a worthy one however the Parramatta Powerhouse plan is not the way to achieve it. It is poorly conceived because it does not utilise Parramatta's unique cultural capital. To achieve the goal the scheme must be recast and

1. Include the development of a museum at the internationally significant Female Factory site and Fleet Street precinct in North Parramatta.
2. Conserve the landscape and buildings of the Fleet Street precinct
3. Play a lead role in co-ordinating the existing Parramatta museums as a single aggregated brand to provide a coherent experience.
4. Provide an ongoing program of exhibitions, events and programmes which interpret the Australia's national stories based on Parramatta exemplars
5. Develop its collections in collaboration with Parramatta's aggregated museum network
6. Have an orientation centre in the Parramatta CBD
7. Retain Willow Grove and St Georges Terrace

It is time to redress the inequities in cultural infrastructure between Sydney's East and West, not through the Parramatta Powerhouse scheme but by creating a counterpoint to Sydney's Art Gallery of NSW in the Museum of NSW in Parramatta, a multi sited aggregated museum with includes the Fleet Street precinct - a museum like no other.

Ian Stephenson



Appendix A

A small selection of items from the MAAS collection which have a direct provenance to Parramatta



Figure 15 Telescope from Governor Brisbane's Observatory, 1820



Figure 16 Wedding dress worn by Ann Marsden at St John's Church Parramatta, 1822



Figure 17 Australian AIDS Memorial Quilt panel in memory of Christian Carrington of Parramatta



Figure 18 First Specimen of Wool produced in Australia, Parramatta, 1804

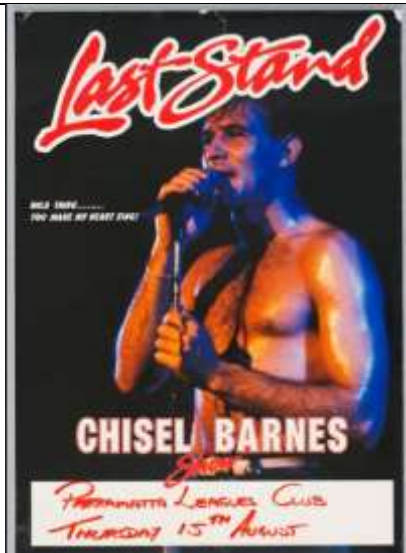


Figure 19 Prototype chalice for St Patrick's Cathedral Parramatta by Hendrik Foster, ca 2000



Figure 20 Wunderlich architectural decoration from a Parramatta building, c. 1930



Figure 21 Egg incubator manufactured in Parramatta in the 1930s



Figure 22 Lachlan Macquarie's Gothic armchair



Figure 23 Candlestick commemorating the turning of the first sod of the Parramatta to Baulkham Hills railway, 1901