

Notes on the second hearing 21 August 2020: attachment 3 to Bulletin 55, 24 August 2020

Parliamentarians were Robert Borsak, (Shooters, Fishermen and Farmers party), chair; Gary Shoebridge (Greens), Ben Franklin and Trevor Khan (National) Taylor Martin, (Liberal), Rose Jackson and Walt Secord ALP. The Liberal / National members spent most of the day working on their phones and appeared to take very little interest in the procedure.

The participants were:

Jennifer Sanders former deputy director MAAS and Lionel Sharp founding director of PHM Ultimo and other comparable museums overseas. Prepared statements outlining the importance of the museum on this site. Stating the obvious, very forcibly. Too dense to summarise.

Questions: why were they not happy with the decision announced on July 4 re the preservation of the museum? Answer is that the only promise was retention of the three major objects, not even of the buildings.

Shoebridge asked for comments on Harwin's criticism of the Harwood building: the history and the point was made that it was very efficient and very adaptable. It was the first overflow of the old museum further up Harris Street and when the conversion took place it was in an ideal position to link in with the new museum.

Staff had dropped from 450 in 1988 to 160 now. Staff morale was low.

Digitisation procedures under way. Sharp said it was a good enterprise but does not require the destruction of the museum and Saunders reminded everyone that this did begin in 2005

Questions were handled well, the point being made often that the museum was the total of context of the buildings, the exhibits and their public appeal. There was huge public interest in and affection for the museum.

Patricia Johnson, Pierre Alexandre of the mighty Save the Powerhouse Facebook, by far the most powerful social media group in the campaign, including Government-funded professional sites. Powerful opening statement, 'representatives and spokespersons for the ordinary people'. 'On 4 July our optimism was short lived. Nothing has changed'. Government did not mention the word museum in heritage protection applications for the buildings and therefore tried to damp down discussion of the destruction of the museum. Questions were handled brilliantly. Emphasis on support for Parramatta.

Andrew Grant and Ian Debenham, former curators who still volunteer at the museum, providing unique skills and **Dr Andrew Simpson,** lecturer in museums studies at Macquarie University with wide practical experience

Grant: disappointment of developments since July 4 announcement. Harwood Building integral to the museum; magnificent and unique facility. On July 31 the Bugatti and other large traditional exhibits of the museum were moved, despite their importance.

Debenham: echoed Harwood facts, museum was not researched, aviation display must remain integrated, sea level rise due to climate change will be a problem, Parramatta has its own special features of museums.

Simpson: similar; made the point that the problem was state-wide, experts not being listened to.

Respondents pointed out that the current letter from the Government to people making comments and the Heritage listing announcement that left the door open for the demolition of all but the shell of the old buildings.

Debenham described the importance of the ready availability of experts and technology experts at the museum, supported by Grant, the point being that retention of the Harwood building was vital to enhance efficiency.

Discussion of moving the Maudslay steam engine. – (imported from England to Goulburn 1837) - there has been discussion of moving it to Goulburn. Grant's opinion that the move should even not be considered: it is part of the permanent exhibition and of national importance and above all very hard to move. If the Government persisted with the move, they would be warned of its danger, and the move process would require very detailed analysis, security risks; echoed by Debenham, (risk of damage through road transport etc and realignment of the assembled machine).

Franklin entered the discussion on whether the Government did intend to gut the museum and Grant replied that the presentation of the museum certainly was not made explicit.

Kylie Winkworth Museum and heritage consultant with world wide reputation and vast Australian experience, **Dr Des Griffin**, former director of Australian museum, **Prof David Philip Miller** Science Emeritus Professor of History & Philosophy of Science at UNSW

Winkworth: general importance of museums: cultural tourism a big earner throughout : Fleet Street site as a World Heritage site would be a winner: recommended that the new museum be here: present site was too small and subject to overland flooding which had been ignored. Molino Stewart were the undoubted experts in this field.

Was the present site too small now considering the Very Large Objects? Griffin: yes, Miller: context of this museum is an important part of the merit of the displays. Likewise Winkworth. PHM Ultimo is the only museum in the world where the context is so significant in the narrative of the museum.

Shoebridge quizzed Winkworth about the flood report and her former role as trustee emerged. W said that the trustees had been sidelined. She had originated the Molino report because of dangers.

Griffin: quizzed on the quality of the museum plan: emphasised the lack of museum expertise in the process and thus would not be successful. There should be staff involvement with critical oversight, not dictatorship. Current Trustees have no museum expertise.

Winkworth: in the past trustees had stood up to Government eg when it was proposed to merge MAAS and Australian Museum but now they just endorsed Government decisions. Government has arbitrarily merged historic houses trust and Archives authority.

Winkworth: since July 4 there had been a meeting with the Government. Minister Harwin had said it was not his decision but he had inherited it. A frank exchange had occurred.

PMA policy had been consistently in favour of a great museum at Parramatta plus retention of PHM and welcomed the opportunity to work with Government to achieve this.

Franklin discussed regional museums with Griffin. Support, and in particular support for touring exhibitions was desirable.

Shoebridge: survey of staff morale indicated that only 20%-30% of the staff were happy with management: Griffin agreed that this was unsatisfactory. The neglect of the Trustees was a factor in this. There was a high turnover of staff. Government should encourage best process in its organisation.

Secord: importance of new chair of trustees is great- Glover will retire at the end of the year: Griffin agreed.

Miller emphasised the importance of this museum in this site; link between the early machines and climate change was well illustrated in this museum..

Lionel Glendenning architect of PHM: Anne Schofield Life fellow and benefactor of museum.

Schofield: Spoke of the concern of donors, present and potential. Great reluctance to contribute because of likelihood of move of museum and particularly of the current lack of direction of the museum. There is a present need for revitalisation. She recurred to this several times. Also 'museum is a separate concept from gallery'; museums involve preservation and celebration of the past; stressed the research component and the role of museums in cultural preservation and transmission.

Glendenning: very critical of heritage listing of 'Ultimo Powerhouse' beginning from the title onwards. Supported the idea of the Legislative Council committee criticising the present heritage process. \$50 million has been wasted.

The great spaces of the museum at Ultimo cannot be replicated at Parramatta, and dispassionately an analysis of the functionality at Parramatta indicates that it is not anywhere near the quality of the present building.

The flood issues would alone should preclude the building of this museum in this site.

Glendenning concluded with an outline of the positive features of this museum, eg the climate control assisted by the seawater channels, a leader in this field. It could be refurbished for \$150 million to top standard.

G would strongly support the use of the Fleet Street site.

Bill d'Anthes Deputy Convenor, Pyrmont Action Incorporated and Suzette Meade North Parramatta Residents Action Group.

Meade: spoke strongly about the Willow Grove retention, above other things mentioning that it had always been owned by women. D'Anthes spoke of need to preserve PHM and also the local support for good facilities for Parramatta.

Asked about consultation: (Meade) very little and typically based on the Government's statements that it was a done deal and the planned museum would be what Parramatta would be getting.

A local museum on the Fleet Street site would be cheaper and better. She, with the help of Jennifer Sanders et al had prepared a business case along these lines and notice of this was being taken by Government authorities.

Suzette was entirely on top of her subject and so forceful that the Liberal and National Party people actually stopped working on their phones and listened.

Steven Molino Principal, Molino Stewart Environmental and Natural Hazards Consultants - Dr John Macintosh engineer specialising in water risks etc;

Molino: (study of flood risks has been commissioned by Powerhouse Museum Alliance) The Parramatta EIS does not allay any concerns and introduces new ones. Because this danger involves life the standard is higher than standard offices, and there are also aspects of danger to irreplaceable exhibits that would mean that a high standard of flood safety would be needed.

Previous studies had concentrated on river flooding, which was a danger, but the local flooding from an exceptional deluge was probably more dangerous. The overland flood would run down the escape routes. Recent floods of about a one in five or ten year probability would cause currents that would be a serious handicap to all but the fittest people. Macintosh agreed and mentioned that emergency floods caused panic and unwise behaviour.

These were two very impressive technical witnesses, entirely professional and 'independent'.