

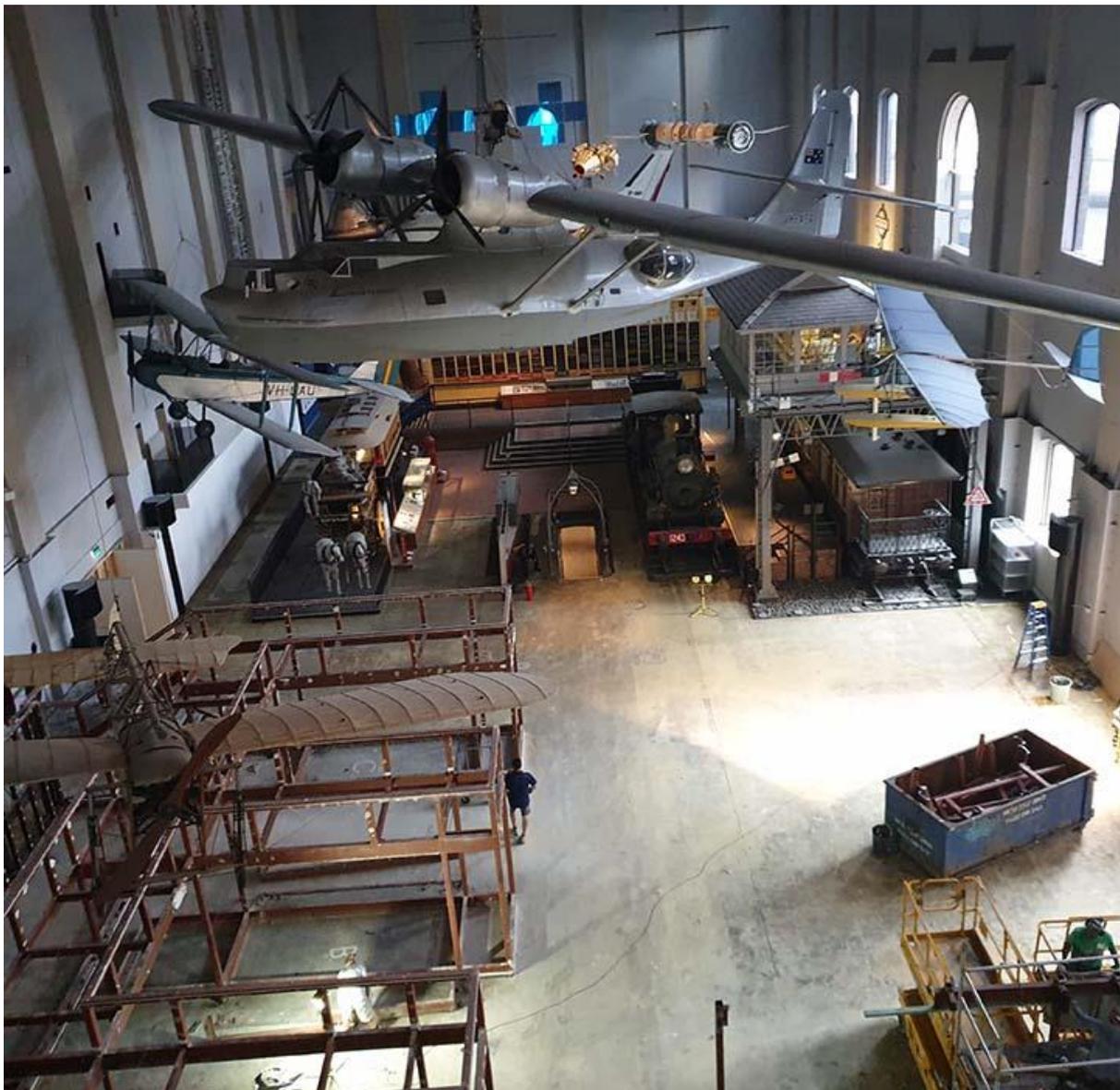
Campaign to Save the Powerhouse

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Bulletin 60: a visit to the museum, 19/3/2021

Destruction now under way in the Transport Hall

The museum was near dead until reprieved from destruction on July 4 last year. To continue the analogy, drastic surgery is now under way. It would be good to have confidence in the surgeons, but the destruction of much of the museum is very alarming, and must be seen as a breach of faith by the Government, because the final plans have yet to be completed and properly assessed.



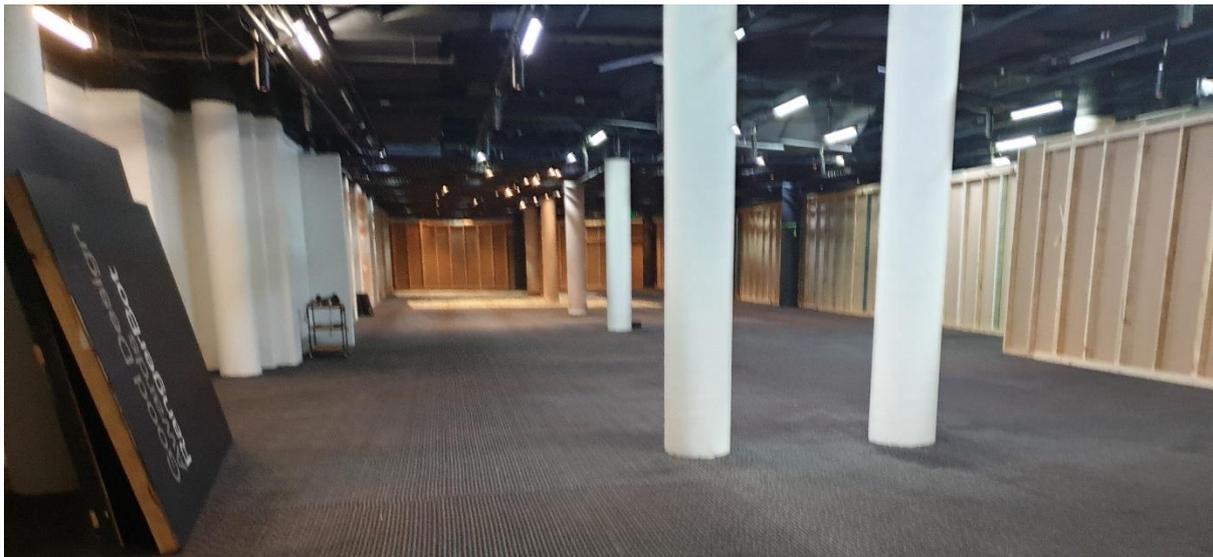
Transport hall from the former members lounge. The steel-framed display cabinets held the traditional 'history of transport' exhibits, which have been very valuable educational materials for the volunteers and the employed education staff – see 'Afterword' page 6. I would have been a little less worried if the Bleriot had been protected from dust by some form of protection, even dust sheets.

On level 1 the only publicly available area is the Wiggles, which has reopened with no 'touching' activities, because of covid restrictions. This has also necessitated the closure of Experimentations, the hands-on activity area, which as yet is not being demolished.

Apart from the hanging aircraft and the transport hall from the horse-drawn tram to the space area, all the rest has been completely stripped. As you can see, major constructions that were an integral part of the museum concept are being destroyed. Major steelwork is being cut up for scrap. It is claimed that the display cases did not meet current fire standards.



Devastation of the Turbine Hall



The area of the Turbine Hall, above, where the popular robotics display was, is bare. This picture was taken a few months ago; the carpet has since been removed. The temporary display space on the Harris Street side of the turbine hall is also devastated.

The Mars Yard was destroyed some months ago. To get an idea of the educational value of the Mars Yard, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKBvt6je2SA> – which deals only with its use for secondary school students. Its main purpose was for the MSc course in robotics in cooperation with University of NSW, which is still current.



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To have any pretence of achieving their goal of ‘rejuvenation’ the Government has a very high standard to reach.

EcoLogic



EcoLogic, which was refurbished only a few years ago, has been completely stripped out. The need for scientific educational material on climate change has never been greater.



The frightening prospect of the death of the museum

The fear of dumbing down the museum, making it an entertainment centre with a few old knickknacks as decoration, is a common theme of the opposition to the 'move' idea. This fear is well founded. It is well illustrated in a document made available in the recent document release: a glossary of terms to be used was found in an email of 1 October 2019 from consultant Tom Kennedy. (His major recent exploit was deep involvement in the demolition of Sydney Football Stadium just before the last State election). In his document he stated that the people working on the 'move' project were not to mention the word 'museum'. They were to refer simply to *Powerhouse Parramatta* and *Powerhouse Ultimo*. This is a tactic straight out of the novel 1984: do not give the people the vocabulary needed to criticise the Government.

The Government has been extremely secretive during the whole process, and the consensus of non-Government experts is that the procedures used do not stand proper security. Readers of these bulletins are well familiar with the facts supporting this process, but in regard to the downgrading of the 'museum' concept, such things as the following are relevant:

- The proposed building at Parramatta certainly does not have adequate workshop and exhibit preparation area, and the Ultimo museum is in grave danger of losing the Harwood building's facilities of this type. This means that if a serious attempt is made to have a locally produced exhibition, it will have to be produced at Castle Hill, with enormous inefficiency.
- In the whole development process, people with museum experience and expertise have been systematically excluded from having any input at a basic level. There were no such people in Johnstaff, the people who prepared the 2018 business case, there are none in Infrastructure NSW or Create NSW, there were none in the entire process of developing the Parramatta institution design. There are no such people among the recently appointed Trustees. The only trustee not involved in big business is the famous teacher Eddie Woo. We have been able to find a total of only around ten hours maximum of involvement, at a basic level by museum specialists over the entire project.
- Among the documents released last December was an enquiry seeking nominations for new consultants for the process. These were not museum people, but lighting and sound consultants.
- Our experts are working through the released Parramatta building specifications. They are working with limited data, but are finding clear evidence that the emphasis is not on providing a world-class museum:
 - The majority of the claimed area is not climate controlled to museum specifications
 - The 50 residential apartments are part of the claimed museum area
 - Even immediately after the acceptance of the winning design it was necessary to cut 6,336 m² from the size of the building at Parramatta in what we believe is a vain attempt to make it a viable financial proposition. (email from Ms Havilah, 29 November 2018).
- The so-called digitisation process that has been propounded as a major part of the overall 'move' project is not proper digitisation – it is rather a cataloguing process. Compare the current digitisation entries with the work done on the Australian Dress Register, <https://australiandressregister.org/>. There seems to be only one 3D item online.
- One of our researchers was horrified to notice an emphasis on corporate functions and dancing, not the museum displays, in much of the labelled display space (first release of documents June 2020 NSW.001.018.1447 - Email from Hanna Slater INSW to George Conha ARUP).

The danger to the Steam Revolution area



The original power station, beautifully built during 1897-99, is now the home of one of the world's great collection of steam engines, had a disproportionately high number of visitors during the time I was in the museum on Friday. If anything, this is an even greater treasure than the transport hall.

We do not have any certainty that this display will not be destroyed. None of the three items promised for retention on July 4 2020 are in this area, and there has been relatively recent correspondence about relocating some of the items in this area.

There is a clear problem with the wooden staging on which some of the exhibits stand, such as the steam threshing machine and the fire engine seen in the picture. These will have to be replaced as the wood has deteriorated. A concern is that the Government will use this an excuse for demolishing this area also. A rational process would ensure that this would be properly investigated, but as this whole project has never had never had a rational basis, we have reason to be very afraid.

This bulletin has been full of bad news, but the fight is not over. More information to come soon!

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Australia's major museum of arts and sciences in Sydney's most evocative heritage building. For more information

**<https://powerhousemuseumalliance.com/> See
also: <http://maasbusinesscase.com/> <http://lockoweb.com/phm/>**

Afterword: does it really matter if such things as these are moved?

The volunteers have lived with these items, sometimes for decades, and depending on people's interest, or at the request of teachers, great EDUCATION occurs. The young professional educators have a great program which integrates the sciences with the creative imagination of the young. These are not just atmospheric old things that decorate a theme park. Just a few items at random:

Adult tricycle 1884 B1260



Preschoolers: adults rode tricycles too; stage 2-3: a fabulous item for students doing the 'basic machines' HSIE units; stage 3-4 Great for introducing study of the social effects of bicycles; mechanic innovation the flywheel which developed momentum great for secondary physics; the effect of this technology on early automobiles; used by educators for brilliant 'what if' development of imagination.

Railway 'trike' H4763



This was made in a regional workshop about 1945 and was used to carry kerosene lamps to the signals each night.

The lamps were hauled to the top of the signals and enabled the train drivers to see the red or green light depending on the position of the signal arm, which could not be seen at night.

The physics of movement are just one fascinating aspect of this item.

Sedan chair c 1880 H4763



Made in France, this is a great object for talking about transport at a basic level – being carried around by two 'chairmen'. Also, it illustrates for design students influence of oriental motifs on luxury objects, also its adaptive reuse in Australia as a phone booth in a luxury home. It is a great catalyst for imaginative input from all ages.

1928 Bugatti B2603



No commentary needed. This item encourages every onlooker to investigate, appreciate, dream.

A traditional part of the transport hall, the Bugatti was moved to the Icons special exhibition then to storage in 2019 and not returned, much to everyone's annoyance.

Honda Insight eco car 2008/226/1.



A fashion and design item with remarkable technical innovations: the acme of hybrid technology: fuel consumption 4.5l/100km, drag coefficient of 0.25 cd. This did not require a glass display case!

Incidentally about five years ago it replaced on display at Ultimo the only Holden electric car, built for the bicentenary of 1988. If only that had been proceeded with the present situation re Australian motor industry might have been different.

Bradbury motorcycle, 1914, B1174



Another exhibit that evokes a reaction from everyone who looks at it! It is beautifully presented and shows off the skills of the people who made it. It is the stuff of dreams: people imagine themselves having the wonderful experience of riding it.

The way the engine and transmission works is open for all to see, and is a revelation to the current generations who seldom even look under the bonnet of a modern automobile. The necessity of ensuring that oil is constantly being fed to the engine is well illustrated by the plunger device that has to be regularly activated. And of course motorcycles had great effects on personal mobility, greatly affecting society as a whole.

Transavia PL-12 Airtruk 1965, 88/288



This aircraft hung from the roof of the Turbine Hall from the inception of the Powerhouse Museum until it was removed to make way for a temporary artwork in 2018.

It was a very strong motivator of engagement. For people that are not familiar with the aircraft, its strange appearance invited comment and questions. For those who were familiar with the aircraft, there was appreciation that it represented a triumph of Australian manufacture, made possible by the genius of Italian immigrant Luigi Pellarini and the enterprise of the Belgiorno-Nettis family, whose company Transfield had been instrumental in changing the face of Australia by erecting much of the electricity grid. This brought electricity from its source – coal or hydro – to the city rather than bringing coal to power stations such as Ultimo. These big power stations caused great pollution and were very inefficient.

Only three aircraft made in Australia have reached quantity production and achieved export success. The Airtruk is a great representative of this process. The Belgiorno-Nettis family are major benefactors of this museum.

Conclusion

It is not suggested that items such as these should be absolutely permanent fixtures, but the point is that a museum is a powerful educative force and a wonderful force in the creative process. The fact that such a high priority is being given to removing these items at this stage gives support to the fear of dumbing down the institution.