

# CHAIRPERSON'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Our Purpose: to define, record and promote migration heritage in the Illawarra



It gives me great pleasure to present our annual report for 2023. While you may not have seen as many pics on our social media sites this year, it's because we have been working hard on some large and significant projects to grow our museum presence in the city.

## **Balgownie/Fairy Meadow Migrant Hostel Campaign**

Members may recall that in late 2022 the University of Wollongong, as part of the proposed construction of a St George Illawarra Dragons Community and High Performance Centre, lodged a development application which entailed the relocation of the last remaining Migrant Hostel Huts in Fairy Meadow to another position on the Innovation Campus.

Once the DA was lodged the MHP, in consultation with the membership and other community members, initiated a campaign to reject the proposal to relocate the huts. The campaign, with the tag line: "Let them stay, don't move them away!", was extensive and involved the writing of many letters to our elected officials as well as NSW Heritage and the wider community to make them aware of the hugely important cultural and historical significance of these huts to the community and the story of the making of our city.

It was with great relief that we were informed in September 2023 that revised plans had been prepared and lodged for the project that would allow the hostel huts to remain in place and the High Performance Centre to be constructed in other locations on the campus. At the time of writing, as far as we are aware, no decision has been made on the revised proposal.

However, what this campaign highlights is the need for constant vigilance and advocacy for buildings and places of social and historical significance to be safeguarded. The Balgownie/Fairy Meadow Migrant Workers Huts were placed on the NSW State Heritage register in 2003, and yet were still vulnerable to new development proposals. It also reminds us to prepare for long campaigns.

## **The Photo Roma Collection Martina and Ballesi**

Documenting the Photo Roma Collection Martina and Ballesi Collection has had a long gestation, but this is the nature of voluntary organisations, we work on the MHP when time allows, and this has been a very large effort. However, over the year we have worked with Mark Ballesi to document and digitise his father's photographic collection.

Local residents may recall that Bruno Ballesi was a well-known photographer who, along with his business partner, Ferruccio Martina, had studios in Warrawong and Wollongong from the 1960s. The MHP believes the collection of photos is of great significance to the region, and we are keen to ensure they are preserved and documented for future generations. We are also very keen to explore the possibility of exhibiting the photos in the future. In the meantime we will be showcasing some of the collection on our website.

## **Museum of People and Industry**

As I reported last year, the Museum of Human Migration Feasibility Study, delivered in March 2020, evolved and transformed into much larger and extensive project that was rebranded as the 'Museum of Illawarra's People and Industry' (MPI).

MHP joined forces with Inside Industry, Lost Wollongong and other local museum advocates, namely Louise Douglas, to plan and lobby for the region to establish a large museum that focusses on the social and industrial history of our region and the state of NSW. The key pillars of the museum include the history of migration, the social history of the area, the stories of our First Nations people and our industrial heritage. In 2023, this working group become a formal sub-committee of the MHP.

Over the last 18 months, significant work has been undertaken to promulgate and garner support for the idea as well as to find committed 'partners' to join the campaign for the construction of an impressive and inspiring centre that will tell the unique stories of our region.

In response to this enthusiastic response and taking on some of the feedback from others in the museum sector, we decided to re-brand to: "The Museum of People and Industry", (dropping Illawarra) so that our museum collections and programs will not be solely limited to regional contexts. This was also partly in response to feedback that we received indicating that a museum focusing on "People and Industry" is unique and not delivered anywhere else in Australia.

With the recent announcement of the extensive and transformational BlueScope Master Planning initiative, the MPI working group has focussed on being included in the planning for an Arts/Heritage/Cultural precinct in these plans, with the MPI being the key foundational building.

As part of the consultations held throughout the year, we have approached one large corporate group, that was very enthusiastic about the museum concept, for support for the preparation of a preliminary business case and museum brief.

More information will be posted on our website in the new year. In the interim, a copy of the concept paper is attached to this annual report.

## **Grant Applications submitted and received during 2022-2023**

Unfortunately, we have not had much success attracting grant funding this year. We did apply for a number of grants from corporate bodies and government agencies but it appears that heritage projects are not very popular at the moment.

However, the MHP were very grateful to receive a \$1000 donation from the BlueScope/WIN Community Partners to support the ongoing work of MHP.

## **Advocacy**

The MHP always takes the opportunity to provide input and/or make formal submissions to key policy development or strategic planning being undertaken across the region. This year the MHP formally commented on the following:

- Wollongong Council Cultural Services Plan
- Wollongong City Council Heritage Plan

## Thank you for your ongoing support

As supporters of the MHP, and other heritage and arts organisations, you will be happy to know that you are doing so much more than supporting groups of volunteers to work on curious and interesting facts about our history. The work of the heritage sector is valuable in many ways, however, when questions of economic value are raised, often the value that is generated by the heritage and arts sectors is overlooked. The arts and heritage sectors support initiatives that enhance health and wellbeing, build community capacity and cohesion as well as build the cultural and economic strength of communities.

Let me quote the eloquent words of Sam Walsh AO, the former Chair of the Australia Council, who in his annual report in 2018-19 stated: *The arts drive regional growth and tourism and share uniquely Australian stories with the world. They are integral to healthy child development and can meet pressing challenges to our nation's health and wellbeing including loneliness, mental health and ageing. They make our individual lives better in myriad ways - from the books that transport us across time and space, or the empathetic plays that help us understand the human condition from our stages; to the music that fills us with joy, grief or pleasure, and which can make us move together to a common beat - the arts are a medium of connection which can celebrate and transcend difference all at once.*

For these reasons, we really appreciate the support that you provide us and encourage you to value the wider contribution you are making to the community through your membership of the MHP.

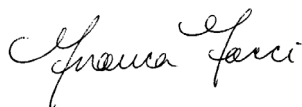
To my fellow members of the MHP, thank you so very much for your drive and commitment to ensuring the MHP stays relevant and visible in the community. Without your input and energy we would not be able to achieve everything that we do.

I wish to pay particular thanks Fidelia Pontarolo as Secretary who works so diligently and tirelessly to keep the MHP safe and active on the website and social media, as well as ensuring we pay our bills and keep the records in order. But more importantly, Fidelia was instrumental in our campaign to keep the Balgownie/Fairy Meadow Migrant Workers Huts in their original location. Fidelia you are a powerhouse!

Thanks also to Gwyn Tavener-Smith for preparing the financial report and assisting the committee with fiscal compliance.

As the year comes to a close, I hope you get to enjoy the fun and spirit of the holiday season in whichever way you chose to spend it. Keep safe, look outwards to the beauty surrounding us and take the opportunity to spend time with your loved ones. Wishing you good health, happiness and much success in 2024.

Kind regards



Franca Facci  
Chairperson  
Migration Heritage Project

2 December 2023

# Museum of People and Industry

PORT KEMBLA

Telling the stories that built us

## Concept Paper

### What is this proposal about?

This proposal seeks to garner support from members of the Illawarra community to be partners in an exciting and visionary infrastructure proposal that will transform our city and the Illawarra in the same way MONA has revolutionized Tasmania.

We are putting forward the idea of creating a heritage and arts precinct in the BlueScope decommissioned industrial area of our city with a Museum of People and Industry (MPI) - Port Kembla, being the centre piece that brings the stories of our culturally rich and diverse community to life. It will be a museum of our social and industrial history enriched by arts and entertainment situated in a large remediated open space.

It will begin with the stories of our First Australians and through ongoing engagement, research, documentation and exhibition, showcase our rich migrant history, highlighting how successive waves of migration have impacted on and shaped our region.

These stories will be underpinned and interlaced with the stories of the industrial giants who were the catalyst for the dramatic and transformational changes our region has witnessed for over 100 years.

These stories will be told through the eyes of the people who lived and came to live here and will generate pride, engagement and extend compassion in our community.

### What will we see in a Museum of People and Industry?

The museum will be new and innovative, telling stories in imaginative and inspiring ways, reflecting the forward thinking of our ancestors. It will:

- Have a permanent collection telling the big, small and surprising stories of the region
- Devise interactive and engaging visitor experiences covering Indigenous, social, human migration, industrial, mining and technological histories of the region
- Protect and respect the significant industrial architecture of the city
- Promote and sustain modern museum practices
- Conduct research and foster links with tertiary institutions
- Incorporate spaces for film, arts and creative industries to flourish
- Create room for the storage of museum objects
- Have large open spaces for concerts and outdoor exhibitions
- Be linked via foot, cycle and public transport networks
- Include retail spaces for complimentary activities

## **Why is a Museum of People and Industry important?**

The Illawarra has a rich and multi-faceted social history deeply embedded in the industrial landscape that has shaped the spaces we live in and made us who we are today.

For over a century, the Illawarra has played a central role in the development and growth of mining and heavy industry as well as facilitating trade and contributing to the economic growth of the nation.

There is also a strong local Indigenous community that has protected the stories of place and people. To further support healing and reconciliation, they need to tell, and we need to hear their stories and experiences.

The history of migration is part of the DNA of the Illawarra. After World War II the heavy industry sector provided employment for one of the biggest workforces in Australia, larger than the Snowy Mountains Hydro Scheme. The Illawarra has a strong and legitimate claim to the New South Wales migration and settlement story, with many migrants and their descendants settling and staying in the Wollongong region.

We deserve to showcase our stories. We deserve to demonstrate how important our experiences have been to the nation. But it is also incumbent on us to tell our stories. We have a responsibility to pass on our stories to our children so they can examine our successes, failures and battle scars to see where they come from and help inform and shape their future.

The Museum of People and Industry will fill the significant gap that currently exists in the researching, recording and security of our stories. Without the work of a museum new generations will have little opportunity to learn about the history of our city.

The need for a more significant and expansive museum presence in our region has been identified and advocated for decades. The vision articulated in this paper aligns with previous advocacy but proposes a way forward to ensure that we create a museum that is multidimensional, sustains other creative practices and re-generates a part of our landscape.

## **Will it replace all the other museums in the area?**

This Museum would not replace any of the smaller museums. On the contrary, it would aim to support and sustain the research and enquiry of smaller museums, bringing them into the larger museum as part of permanent or temporary exhibitions.

## **What are the benefits to the region?**

A significant (and magnificent) heritage and arts precinct would generate local and international tourism, incubate ideas and further funding opportunities as well as increase visitor spending in hospitality, accommodation and associated sales.

Quality locations also attract visiting exhibitions and blockbuster events which draw significant visitors.

Large Museums and cultural precincts provide significant and sustainable job opportunities in diversified fields. In 2009 Museums and Galleries NSW (MGNSW) determined that with every paid employee in a museum, an average of 8.5 positions in other sectors are created and 500

hours of volunteer time and expertise is contributed per week. Importantly visitors purchase overnight accommodation, dining and other destination experiences. They stimulate economic growth and lift the quality of local businesses and tourism operators.

ABS' data estimated that in 2008 – 2009 cultural and creative activity provided over \$86 billion (6.9%) to Australia's economy outranking retail trade, education and training, and agriculture, forestry and mining (ABS no longer collects this data).

From an environmental perspective, a heritage and arts precinct would transform our city so we could:

- Retain our industrial architecture and landscape as a space for residents and tourists to explore
- Remediate industrial sites, including Mt Kembla mine and Corrimal Cokeworks
- Allow visitors to explore the magnificence and awe of large buildings and spaces
- Create tourism experiences e.g. Sydney Harbour Bridge climb, cycling tours, links to Cringila and Mt Kembla Mountain Bike trails
- Preserve our machinery and transport vehicles
- Create new jobs in emerging sectors

There are also significant intangible benefits derived from museums including:

- The pride and validation of the local community who see their stories told to wider audiences
- The expression of empathy and compassion towards neighbours and community when visitors are afforded another view of history
- The growth of enquiry and learning that museums foster by rigorous research and documenting evidence.
- Stimulating curiosity and innovation.

### **How will this be funded?**

This is an ambitious project which can not be funded by a single government agency or business operation.

This project is by necessity, a collaborative enterprise that pursues a shared vision. Many sources of funding will be required supported by a robust plan and business case with short, medium and long term goals.

It will require strong leadership to take the vision forward and foster cross-sectoral collaboration and financial support.

There are examples in Australia and around the world from which to draw inspiration and knowledge. The Landscape Park Duisborg Nord (in Germany), the ERI – European Route of Industrial Heritage and the Guggenheim in Bilbao are some examples.

With an agreed vision, an enterprise of this magnitude could source funds from:

- Federal, State and Local Governments
  - Funding program
  - Special establishment grants

- Philanthropic organisations
- Donations from large industry groups
- Crowd sourcing
- Economic development and recovery grants

### Why are Museums important in our society?

This is an extract from the Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Parliamentary Inquiry into Museums and Galleries from the Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD) 12 August 2016. It provides an eloquent description of the roles of museums in our community.

*“Museums have a core role to communicate information drawn from the collections and associated research to the public through their exhibitions and programs on and off site and online. They are among the most trusted of Australia’s institutions due to the knowledge implicit in their collections and the careful objectivity of the research infusing their exhibitions and public programs. In their communications to the public they bring together a multitude of viewpoints on significant issues, interpret complex subjects, promote community understanding and engage users of all ages in the search for the past, an understanding of the present and to canvass future solutions to ‘big issues’ such as national identity and sustainability.”*

### Authors

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### Want to play a part in getting this up? Contact:

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