



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**GRIEVANCE DEBATE**

**Parramatta Electorate: North  
Parramatta Colonial Heritage Precinct**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 2 March 2015**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Owens, Julie, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms OWENS** (Parramatta) (17:20): In North Parramatta there is a phenomenal colonial heritage precinct that rivals any in Australia by far. It is truly, truly amazing. It is just a short walk from the CBD. And it currently is in danger, thanks to Bruce Baird and UrbanGrowth's plans to overdevelop the site with buildings of between six and 50 storeys high right up against the base of some of our most significant convict heritage buildings. There are more historical buildings in the North Parramatta precinct than there are in the Rocks, by far. The precinct contains Australia's first Female Convict Factory. It contains a number of buildings from the 1700s which are very rare in Australia and in fact Parramatta. That region has the three that are in existence in this area. It contains a group of buildings including the Female Convict Factory and the Parramatta Girls Home that records the history of women, particularly the incarceration of women, for 200 years of settlement. It also borders the World Heritage listed Old Government House and falls within its vistas, which are covered by the World Heritage listing.

The precinct nestles on the banks of Parramatta River. In 167 hectares of mainly hospital land it houses the current Cumberland Hospital, with a number of single- and two-storey buildings surrounded by extensive large areas of open space where the residents, both from the hospital and from community accommodation, currently wander. At the north is the Parramatta Gaol, an extraordinary collection of sandstone buildings built in 1835 and arguably, with one other town claiming the status, the oldest existing jail in Australia. It is on the banks of Darling Mills Creek, which runs along the north side of the precinct. If you follow that creek along for about a kilometre you reach the place where it joins Toongabbie Creek to form the Parramatta River. That is the location where Governor Phillip landed just a few weeks after the settlement in Sydney Cove. He went up the river looking for farmland and landed there at the confluence of the Parramatta River and then walked down the riverbank recording in his diaries as he went, until he found the location that he identified for the spot for Australia's Government House. When you look across the river, there is the wisteria garden from 1866 and the oldest building in Australia, which is Australia's Government House. If you turn around and look back towards the site you will see the old Female Convict Factory, commissioned by Governor Macquarie from his residence in Old Government House and designed by Francis Greenway—older and far more intact than the World Heritage listed Cascade Convict Factory in Tasmania—and surrounded by 67 other heritage buildings in the precinct. In the middle of the 167 hectares is the Cumberland Hospital, a mental health facility built around what was the lunatic asylum, as it was called at the time, that used the old convict factory buildings when it was closed in 1848.

It is an extraordinary location and part of a larger historical area of Parramatta, including the girls' orphanage at Rydalmere, where the female children of the convicts were kept, and the Elizabeth Macarthur farm in Harris Park. If you go there you will be on land that has been in public hands since colonisation. You will see trees planted in the early days of settlement as a botanic garden. You will walk through the old sports oval, with its heritage listed pavilion, and you will see Bethel—a little dolls' house, a gorgeous little two-storey building that was Australia's first children's hospital and forms part of the Roman Catholic orphanage grounds, where the Catholic children of the convict women were housed once they were removed from their parents at the age of two, back in the convict days. It was later used as the Parramatta Girls Home. It is a place of terrible stories and a place where the Stolen Generations of New South Wales were kept, and it is still there. Beside it is the Gipps courtyard, still intact. When women arrived on those early convict ships, if they were not selected for their looks—essentially as servants, because there were five men for every woman in the settlement at the time—they were sent to the Gipps courtyard, where they lived and broke rocks. That courtyard is intact. Overlooking one side of it is the second-class convict factory, and overlooking the wall on the other side is the orphanage where the children looked down to identify their mothers once they were removed from them, at the age of two.

It is an extraordinary place. It is still intact, surrounded by high sandstone walls, with few entrances. It is currently used as the Cumberland Hospital's workspace, so it is filled with trucks, storage and rubbish points, but it is still intact.

Under New South Wales state government urban growth plans for 'revitalising the precinct', they will be selling off large plots of land, including the land inside the Gipps Courtyard, for building two large buildings of six

storeys in the intact Gipps Courtyard, where the convict women were first taken when they arrived at the settlement, where they lived and broke rocks. They will be breaking the view into the courtyard between the second-class convict factory and the children's orphanage. Just to make things even better they are going to punch six holes through the sandstone walls so that people can get in and out of the residences in the courtyard.

Just to add insult to this, there is a rather rare colony of grey-headed flying foxes living on the Parramatta River, right up against the wall, that currently enjoy a 300-metre exclusion zone. They will be somewhere between 10 and 15 metres from the balconies of high-rise units. I cannot see that the bats will survive the construction. If they did, they certainly will not survive the complaints of residents who walk out on their balconies to see bats roosting within a few metres of their rather expensive residential units. I cannot see that that is going to happen.

I cannot imagine that this would happen anywhere other than Western Sydney. I cannot believe it would happen in Balmain or in the inner city—it certainly did not happen to The Rocks. In fact, some of the buildings in The Rocks were renovated with red bricks that were taken from the oldest three-storey building in the colony in Parramatta. The Hyde Park Barracks was actually renovated with sandstone blocks taken from a Greenway building in Parramatta. I cannot believe that the treatment of this site would be as it is anywhere else other than Western Sydney. It is disgraceful.

If you walk through one of the holes punched in the Gipps Courtyard you will be in another courtyard that houses what used to be the Roman Catholic Orphanage, built in 1841, and Bethal, the first children's hospital, which does look like a chocolate box—it is so beautiful. It was later used as isolation cells for the Parramatta Girls' Home, so it has some terrible stories and some special meaning to a large number of people, including the stolen generation—the Indigenous children were put there when they were taken from their families. It is an incredibly important place. That courtyard has also been sold off, and there will be a high-rise residential building within metres of Bethal, dwarfing it and removing the vista of it for visitors. A building between six and 10 storeys high will be as close to it as I am standing to you, Deputy Speaker, here in the chamber today. Those buildings sit right up against the sandstone walls that surrounded the Parramatta Girls' Home. Again, there are extraordinary plans for this incredibly important location.

Turning to the landing site for Governor Phillip, on the confluence of the river. If you stand there currently, you are in the middle of nowhere. You cannot see buildings. You can see the confluence of the two creeks forming the river. There are trees on either side of the banks. Under these plans, the river bank on the side will have high-rise buildings right on the bank. It is far too close for the local environment plan and far too close within the exclusion zone overlooking the site where Governor Phillip landed. It should be one of the greatest historical sites in Australia. It is where Governor Phillip started writing his diaries. It will literally be overshadowed by high-rise buildings just a few metres away. Existing roads will be repositioned conveniently to take out the trees, which otherwise would not be able to be removed, because they are heritage listed trees from the colonial days, planted as part of a botanic garden within the site.

According to the plans, Parramatta War Memorial Swimming Pool, taken out of Parramatta Park, has an eight-storey and 12-storey building on the pool, rezoned, with several six-storey buildings in the car park, with the pool relocated to a commercial venue on what is currently a public oval within the Cumberland Hospital site. There are 6,000 units planned on this site—6,000 additional residential units on a site—without considering the heritage aspects at all. The worst thing about this is that while the government plans to sell off all this land so close to these heritage buildings, it has no plans at all about how it is actually going to refurbish or use the heritage buildings themselves. It is a quick land grab, turning the suburb into a dormitory that dwarfs the heritage values without any consideration of what they are actually going to do.