

HISTORY HOUSE BUILDING PROJECT UPDATE

Phillip Black, Chair History House Committee - July 2015



Mr Phillip Black, RAHS Councillor and Chair of the RAHS History House Committee, provides an overview of the History House building plans to attendees of the RAHS Champagne Supper History House Fundraiser in July.

When the Royal Australian Historical Society was established in 1901 our founding members had neither the funds nor ambition to acquire a permanent home base. Instead in those early years the Society used various available venues until securing rooms within the NSW Department of Education Building in Bridge Street, Sydney.

In 1923 a Building Fund was established enabling the RAHS to acquire a property in 1941; a former wool store, in Young Street. However the site became within the City block that the AMP Society would gradually entirely acquire. Protracted negotiations began resulting in AMP acquiring a new site for the RAHS by purchasing 133 Macquarie Street for the RAHS on an exchange basis for the Young Street Property.

The 1871-72 Victorian town house, designed by architect George Allen Mansfield, needed to be re-fitted for the RAHS. Restoration and construction work was undertaken by architect Barry Swain, Peddle Thorp & Walker during 1969-70 and the building re-opened as "History House" on 12 November 1970. The work included demolition of the service wing backing onto Phillip Lane, allowing for a covered loading dock, above which the extended floor provided an auditorium and the level above addition library space. A lift and fire stair exit were also included.

Since then the RAHS has carried out maintenance and enhancement work on this now rare example of the town houses that once were prominent in Macquarie Street. External

fabric has been repaired, the main reception rooms were re-decorated and furnished for the period of the building. Library storage has been improved and modern kitchen facilities have been installed to service the reception rooms.

Now almost 50 years on from the building acquisition and refit for the RAHS, it's time to bring this significant heritage building into the 21st Century. Of utmost urgency is replacement of the 1970s lift, but regardless of any other alterations or additions to the building, the most concerning is the need for improved fire detection and suppression systems, as well as disability access.

With all these issues gradually mounting, the RAHS Council established a tax deductible Building Fund in 1996, launched by the Hon Robert Debus MP, Minister Assisting the Minister for the Arts. A pleasing number of financial contributions were received at that launch, with continuing donations received with members' annual subscriptions and other donations. The funds held are relatively small for what is now expected to be a five to six million dollar project.

Hence, in July, the Society held a Building Fund re-boot Champagne Supper which raised \$7,500. A fantastic contribution from members and friends! The next prong on the fund raising effort is to approach corporate and philanthropic organisation for donations.

The Building Project, as well as essential building upgrade, will consequently provide increased space to members, volunteers and staff, including space for digital media, upgraded IT and building services and a roof-top green space teaching area. More on the Building Project in a future issues.

All donations over \$2 are tax deductible and should be made payable to the *History House Building Fund*.



History House pre-1870. The townhouse, which has become known as History House, was originally numbered as 163 Macquarie Street. Now at 133 Macquarie Street, this building was one of the last terraces to be built during this period. History House can be seen third from the left in this image [State Library of NSW].