

08 February 2021

Mr Derek Smyth
Council Officer
City of Sydney
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Dear Mr Smyth,

Reference Number D/2020/1386, 82-84 Dixon Street , Haymarket - Internal and external reparation works

On 25 September, 2019 the Board of the National Trust resolved to place the **Former Kwong War Chong & Company Buildings**, at 82/84 Dixon Street, Haymarket on the National Trust Register. Sydney City Council was formally notified of this Listing. A copy of the National Trust Register Listing Report is attached.

In January 2020 the National Trust of Australia (NSW) expressed its strong objections to the proposal for internal and external reparation works to the buildings at 82/84 Dixon Street, Haymarket. The works proposed had the potential to seriously impact upon the intact historic interiors which form a major part of the building's heritage significance, and the Heritage Impact Statement which was prepared to support the Development Application was hopelessly inadequate. We note that an Interim Heritage Order currently applies to 82-84 Dixon Street. The Trust raises objections to elements of the current proposal.

82-84 Dixon Street

The National Trust commend the City of Sydney for commissioning a Heritage Assessment (15 July 2019) by Hector Abrahams Architects. We agree with the recommendation that in view of the considerable significance of 82-84 Dixon Street to New South Wales for its historical, associative, and rarity values, it should be listed on the City of Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012 (now undertaken) and the New South Wales State Heritage Register (currently under consideration).

The timber-framed shop front of 84 Dixon Street is a rare survival in the City of Sydney, and we note the heritage assessment (p.9) states that *"the interior of 84 Dixon Street appears to have largely retained its original layout, with some changes occurring over the course of its history."* The hand-operated goods lift, kitchen, bedroom, and "substantial collection of furniture, appliance and ephemera" make this building a place with unique potential to showcase the history and stories of this place in a most vivid way rarely offered in a commercial business district. We note the conclusion of the heritage assessment (p.22) that the significance *"is embodied in the façade of the building, and in the interior of 84 Dixon Street— including shop front, partitions, doors, stairs, and hand-operated goods lift - and the historic ephemera contained within the building which includes packing-crate furniture, washing machines, bathtubs, calendars, crockery, merchandise, and personal effects."*

The Trust agree when the report recommends (p.51) that *"there is minimal tolerance for change to 84 Dixon Street, where there is a great deal of significant original fabric and ephemera."* The retention of the fabric, layout and historic ephemera all need to be considered contextually – removal of items such as crockery, merchandise, calendars, washing machines, etc from their setting will make them merely "moveable heritage"



objects, unable to tell their story about this community and way of life, and will also impact the significance of the built fabric. Museum use is most appropriate. Conversely, 82 Dixon Street does offer the ability for modification and has a much greater tolerance for change.

The National Trust specifically raise the following comments on the current proposal:

- The proposal to dedicate the upper two floors of 84 Dixon Street as a Chinese Australian History Museum is supported in principle. The exact nature of this institution will need to be the subject of future discussion and approval.
- The ground floor shop of 84 Dixon Street should be retained and incorporated in to any Museum proposal for the place. This is a key attribute of the building and its significance. A separate, modern, retail premises (with little or no connection to the history and fabric of the place) would be to the detriment of one of the most integral parts of the place – that is, the whole basis for the building is that it is a SHOP. To locate any Museum only on the upper floors would limit its appeal, prominence, and rationale.
- The removal of later fabric in the ground floor of No.84 Dixon Street (deemed to be “non-significant”) to facilitate a retail use will have an impact on the significance of the place, as this later fabric may in itself contribute to the ongoing history and use of the place. The basis for the listing of this building is precisely that it shows evidence of continuous occupation until more recent times. (This is the case with the National Trust’s own property “Saumarez” at Armidale, which shows evidence of occupation of a 19th century homestead until the late 1970s; or indeed the Sydney Living Museum’s “Susannah Place” which showcases changing fashions and use across the row of terraces.)
- The restoration of the shopfront at 82 Dixon Street is supported, however this will only be effective as a conservation measure if an appropriate usage for this space is part of the proposal. There are many modern, sympathetic uses that could be found for this space.

413-415 Sussex Street

The demolition of the former Anthony Hordern & Co warehouse (413-415 Sussex Street) would also appear to be a substantial heritage loss for the city. This large building, constructed in 1913, is not assessed in any great detail in the accompanying Heritage Impact Statement. The alteration of the façade to include an “infill glazed curtain wall between the rendered masonry piers” does not assess in any great detail how this was undertaken and whether in fact more original fabric lies beneath such infill. Conversions to the former Mark Foy’s Warehouse (Goulburn Street) and indeed the new yet sensitively inserted “Skye Suites” at 302 Kent Street illustrate the possibilities for adaptive re-use and placemaking that are possible with such structures when undertaken by a competent architect.



Comparison between 413-415 Sussex Street and the more recent 302 Kent Street. Adaptive re-use may indeed be possible with this building. (Source: Google Street View)



ANTHONY HORDERNS' NEW STORE.

The foundations have been laid of a large bulk store to be erected for Messrs. Anthony Hordern and Sons, at the corner of Dixon, Sussex, and Little Hay streets. The store, which will be five stories high, has frontages of 176ft. to Little Hay-street, 78ft. to Dixon-street, and 41ft. to Sussex-street. It is being built of brick and cement, partly steel construction, and partly ironbark girders and story posts being adopted. Grinnell sprinklers are provided, and there will be four electric goods lifts. Messrs. Morrow and De Putron are the architects, and the contractors are Messrs. J. C. Harrison and Sons, of Ashfield. Owing to the yielding nature of the ground, some difficulty was experienced with the foundations, but this was overcome by laying them on piles with reinforced concrete.

"ANTHONY HORDERNS' NEW STORE" (Source: The Daily Telegraph, 10 Sep 1912, page 9)

The Heritage Impact Statement simply states "the existing building was constructed in c.1913 as an Anthony Hordern & Sons bulk stores building" and indicates that this building is not on any heritage list, but does not research this further. The building was in fact designed by Morrow and De Putron architects and is of an unusual in being partly steel, partly timber, and partly masonry construction. It is unsure from the documentation submitted whether the "ironbark girders and story posts" remain intact under later fabric but this would be presumed to be the case. Running the entire length of the block, the building makes an obvious contribution to the streetscape (admittedly compromised by later adaptations that could be removed) and has not been seriously considered for retention or creative adaptation. Any ironbark timber should be appropriately recycled if intact.

Conclusion

Sensitive and adaptive re-use may be possible with the other structures on the site, but the building at 84 Dixon Street represents a very rare offering that must be recognized as a significant opportunity within the City that will not present itself again. Works that will reduce the cultural and historic significance of this building should be refused.

Yours sincerely,

David Burdon
Director, Conservation