

PHA VIC & TAS

Professional Historians Association
VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



PO Box 1223
Carlton VIC 3053
Australia

www.phavic.org.au
mail@phavic.org.au

Heritage Strategy Team
City of Melbourne
enquiries@melbourne.vic.gov.au

Submission to the City of Melbourne

In response to

***Heritage, People and Place
Discussion Paper 2024***

Submitted 16 March 2024

About us

The Professional Historians Association was established in Victoria in 1991.

In 1989, a small group of Monash University Public History graduates formed a group to advance the field of public history. In 1991, this group formed an association supporting members to forge career paths as public historians independent of universities.

Since the early 1990s professional historians have completed hundreds of published histories on diverse topics for organisations and communities. Many books, peer-reviewed articles, heritage reports have been written; museum collections assessed, curated and exhibited; websites and podcasts produced and created; and specialist historical advice contributed to films and documentaries.

Membership of the Professional Historians Association is contingent on accreditation according to rigorous national standards, historians work to a code of ethics and are guided by a national scale of fees (administered by Professional Historians Australia).

In 2018, Victoria and Tasmania merged and today the association is made up of a formidable list of who's who in the history and heritage community.

From a handful of historians in 1991, PHA (Vic & Tas) now represents over 230 historians across two states.

Contact

Dr Sophie Couchman
President, PHA (Vic & Tas)
president@phavic.org.au

16 March 2024

Submission to City of Melbourne

Heritage, People and Place (Discussion paper 2024)

Proposal (Focus 2 Heritage Interpretation) - instating a city historian to work with developers and the community to find and guide opportunities to share stories, and inform City policies and projects

<https://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/heritage-strategy>

The Professional Historians Association (Vic & Tas) would like to offer particular support to the proposal within the City of Melbourne's discussion paper, 'Heritage, People and Place', to appoint a City of Melbourne Historian.

The PHA applauds the people-centred focus proposed for the City of Melbourne's heritage strategy which we believe empowers communities to shape the cultural heritage that is important to them. and goes beyond the outdated concept of 'saving pretty buildings' to one in which the social, political and spiritual values of our built environment are as important as their physical fabric.

To fully implement a people-centred heritage focus, we believe the City should appoint a historian who can:

- discover the stories and voices from our past, including Melbourne's rich Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Boon Wurrung history and heritage, and bring it to life for a wide audience
- inform, interpret and advise on historical sites to help the City develop and prosper in a way which incorporates its valued history and heritage

Our history and heritage, the way we interpret it, read it, view it and engage with it, is dynamic and evolving. A recent example is the work done in Victoria on the significance of LGBTIQ+ places, many of which are in the City of Melbourne.¹ The framework established through this report for 'understanding heritage in a way that reveals the histories of LGBTIQ+ people and communities' illustrates a truly people-centred approach.

¹ <https://www.heritage.vic.gov.au/our-programs-and-initiatives/a-history-of-lgbtqi-victoria>

As the Yoorrook Justice Commission continues its investigations into historical and ongoing injustices committed against Aboriginal Victorians since colonisation, the City of Melbourne will be contributing to and addressing the commission's findings. Truth-telling and treaty will pave the way for the need to reconsider history and heritage from all facets and this presents many opportunities to reinvigorate and reconcile the layering of history and heritage from a First Nations' perspective.

A dedicated historian would ensure that the social, community, urban and corporate histories of Melbourne and the local government area are recorded, preserved, interpreted, presented and made accessible. Through the work of a dedicated historian, the City of Melbourne has the opportunity to explain and celebrate past events, people and places which make it unique. Our pubs, our cafes, our back laneways make Melbourne an interesting and colourful place to be, beyond the impressive edifices of the State Library, the Royal Exhibition Building and the Old Treasury Building.

We understand that the creation of a full-time City Historian position by the City of Sydney in the mid-1990s acknowledged the need for an in-house capacity to provide advice and information as a business support service for Council. The role not only fulfilled (and continues to fulfil) this capacity, but now extends well beyond it. The City Historian, assisted by a team of historians and heritage professionals, is now responsible for researching and writing publications, creating on-line content, recording oral histories, designing displays, and giving public talks and media presentations to promote the Council's involvement with its history.²

Similarly, the City of Kingston in Victoria has employed a City Historian since 1997.³ This historian has been responsible for the development of a historical website which includes over 650 articles and many photos capturing the municipality's past and conducting a narratives project with a high level of community participation. In Queensland the Sunshine Coast Council has instigated a 'historian in residence' position, which has resulted in many projects of interest and benefit to its residents.⁴ There are many more examples internationally. In New York State, for example, a law was passed in 1919 to create an officially appointed historian in every town, village, city, borough and county across the State.⁵

In Melbourne, we believe the appointment of a historian, or indeed a history/heritage consultative body, makes good business sense. Historical advice and expertise can contribute significantly to the sustainability goals of the City. The sensitive renovation and repurposing of heritage buildings and sites needs to satisfy both community values and business objectives.

As a service to the City of Melbourne, a dedicated historian is able to respond in an appropriate and timely way, to public requests for historical information related to the City, liaising and consulting with stakeholders both inside and outside the organisation. If the City of Melbourne is to develop a dynamic people-centred approach to heritage, community collaboration is a key factor, making cultural heritage more diverse, accessible and inclusive for all.

Melbourne is already recognised as a City of Literature, having been awarded this status by UNESCO in 2009. This status recognises that Melbourne citizens are among the most well-read

² <https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/history-archive-collections>

³ <https://www.kingston.vic.gov.au/environment/heritage-and-planning>

⁴ <https://heritage.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/about/programs-and-events/historian-in-residence>

⁵ <https://www.nysl.nysed.gov/msscfa/sc23302.htm>

in Australia with State Library Victoria housing more than 3.5 million items – books, articles, newspapers and objects of literary note – within its walls. Those items, of course, include many related to the history of Melbourne.

In conclusion, we believe a historian can contribute to the cultural and intellectual life, as well as the physical development, of the City by maintaining an awareness of key issues, trends and the political environment which can impact on City operations and initiatives by providing historical context on issues as required.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sophie Couchman', written in a cursive style.

Dr Sophie Couchman
President
PHA (Vic & Tas)

16 March 2024