

Dear Jenny

I have received your latest communication with reference to the above subject. I will be in Vietnam on the night of the Meeting, which I regard as most unfortunate. I have been a Member for less than a year and, though I really appreciate the Museum, there are things I would have liked to say about what I feel the Museum does not present to the public. I actually joined the Friends of the Museum to get access to what is available in the Archives of the Museum. But apart from one invitation to see something like vehicles there has been no invitation to see what is actually in storage which has been a great disappointment to me.

There are many things I do like about the Museum, particularly the Aboriginal Exhibition, where I have seen many things I have not seen since my childhood. Having grown up in Queensland and spent much time in the bush, I had the privilege of seeing and experiencing many things that many Australians today have not. What I don't like about it is the lack of old photographic material, such as can be seen in Wentworth Gaol of what life was like for Aboriginal people, in their own natural state. Having said that, it is a great exhibit. Your letter states that 94% of people are satisfied with their visit. That is probably correct in many cases, particularly the first two visits. The Museum is new, however, and people will not continue to have that view. Particularly, I find a very negative attitude once they have settled down with what they have seen and begin thinking about what they didn't see. With regards to the major exhibits in the bigger building, some of it is very good and some of it is very interesting, but once it is seen, probably only one more visit remains interesting. There should be a core exhibition which remains on show, i.e. the Australian Gallery at the Australian National Gallery, but there are so many facets in our history which are almost entirely ignored, and about which people are very interested. I hear the same statements from many different people who have been visitors to Canberra, and therefore the Museum. All of these statements refer to what isn't in the Museum and often it has to do with their own backgrounds which they feel is ignored. Some people have said they feel like they often felt about the National Gallery in the past. That feeling was that the powers that be decided what the general public should like and therefore bought and exhibited pieces they felt the public should like, rather than what the populace really likes to see when they go to the Gallery. I, myself, feel that the exhibits have been a great effort for the opening of the Museum but that it must change the exhibits regularly. Many of my visitors have only one chance to see what there is, and remember what they didn't see.

My feelings on the subject cover a wide range of subjects which I will list:

Immigration: early 1800s; late 1800s; early 1900s and post-war. This should cover where these people came from; why did they leave, what was everyday life like on the ships; what did the passengers actually do when they arrived on Australian soil. I know there are little museums around the country, but this is the National Museum and people want to see this sort of thing when they come. Overseas visitors want to know about Australians and this part of our history tells them much, just who we are. At Ellis Island in New York,

people really know what it is like to have "arrived in America". Do most Australians have any idea what it was like to float around in a little boat and arrive here as a Vietnamese boat person. The Vietnamese Australians that I know who arrived that way have done very well and make great Australians.

Gold: I know we had a special exhibition of this when the Museum opened but most people didn't see that. Gold played such a large part in the development of this country and our visitors say "seeing a gold nugget doesn't show us much" and telling them there was an exhibition only elicits a blank stare. Many Australians have at least one ancestor who came here for the gold.

Bushrangers: It seems everyone wants to know where is the section on Bushrangers!

Chinese in Australian History: The Chinese have a most amazing history in this country but the Museum concentrates on Anglo-Saxon history in Australia. We have so many ethnic groups in this country but they feel they are ignored. One of my girls married into a Greek family who have been here since around 1910/1920 and they said they feel like they don't belong to this country after visiting our Museum. This family numbers many, of whom all have become Australian and are highly educated professional people. They are wealthy and all live in the Eastern suburbs of Sydney, but they feel they have no history here. My family are Irish, but there is little in the Museum about the history of the Irish in Australia and they have helped to make Australians what we are. What about some history on the refugees who came to Australia after World War II, and later.

Life in Australia during difficult times: What was life like for the average Australian during the Wars; the Depression etc. There is a touch on this subject, and I really just love "the pram". How did people manage to live at such times. During the Depression, my father had to leave the property to make it easier on his parents with the younger children. He took up painting and travelled around with ladders across his shoulder. Can any young person to-day even briefly imagine doing such a thing. My mother walked from business to business to get an apprenticeship as a dressmaker, living in a one room bedsit, with her cat, and then ended up with her own "frock shop" in the Brisbane Arcade, and was a very successful business woman to boot. People did amazing things with little education! Somehow the Museum has to make the children of to-day understand how Australians became what they are. I presently know a young man from the States who says "this is such a tough country and Australians must be really tough to live here". I gave him *The Fatal Shore* to read and it is amazing the understanding he now seems to have as to why Australians are the way they are, whatever that means to him.

The Convict Years: Everyone is interested in this era of Australian history, even if they don't have a convict ancestor. Not everyone has the opportunity to go to Port Arthur, or Norfolk Island. Overseas visitors don't have the time or even the knowledge to know where to go to see these things. It is a very necessary exhibition for the National Museum.

Some of these subjects could be covered in special exhibitions, but then visitors still feel ignored when they make their visits and their history is not mentioned. Somehow, there has to be room for everyone. Perhaps you could change the Special Exhibitions more often. The recent exhibition on Space was wonderful and I enjoyed it so much but it has nothing to do with Australian history. I have to say that many of my visitors say they don't see any point in seeing a silver spade that someone or other used to open something or other.

I must say, in finishing, that I have been absolutely delighted that the Museum of Australia was built, and I wish it well and I have great hope that it will go on educating and entertaining Australians and visitors for generations to come. I have written this in a great rush, given that I am leaving on holiday. Perhaps this doesn't fit the Terms of Reference, but it is offered with sincerity and the hope that the Museum can go on to greater things.

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