Meeting with the Design Directors for the Lands Building Hotel.

On Wednesday, 1 June a meeting was held between representatives of the Institution of Surveyors, NSW Inc, Lands Proposal Ad hoc Committee and the Design Directors of the Pontiac Land Group, lessees of the Bridge Street Lands Building. You may recollect that the NSW Government has leased the Lands Building for conversion into an International hotel. Consequently, ISNSW had put a proposal to the NSW government seeking its support for the fit out of the interior of the Lands Hotel with a heritage theme that reflected its former use. The meeting with the lessee’s design people followed a belated and somewhat lukewarm response to this proposal from the Office of Environment and Heritage.

The meeting was very cordial and supportive of the theme. Ian Lomas, the Design Architect, is currently involved in the redevelopment of the Wynyard Station, and enthusiastically supports the incorporation of heritage and history in the redevelopment of buildings. Jonathon Bryant, the Heritage Architect, is responsible for the design of the interior of the Lands Hotel, was recently involved in the conversion of the former Water Board Building into the Primus Hotel. Greg Incoll, the Development Director, is known for “getting things done”. They all emphasised their keen desire to incorporate the heritage of the building in its conversion to a hotel, and already propose a “before and after” Coffee Table Book about its heritage and its conversion from a Government office to a hotel.

Their enthusiasm, together with Pontiac’s reputation for creating high quality “themed” hotels, gives us confidence that they could not only incorporate the Lands heritage theme into the hotel, but they would do it well. It is an exciting prospect.

Professor Peter Webber was able to obtain the Pontiac Group contacts for the meeting. The Design Directors were provided with the Lands Proposal Submission before the meeting, and we spoke to that submission. In this, the matter of the alienation of Crown Land and the dispossession of the Aborigines was raised as a matter of concern. However, the proposal to incorporate settler-history into the Lands Building complements its exterior and has direct links to its heritage and past use. Undeniably, exploration, surveying and land settlement did occur, and its connection with Lands site and building is very important in Australian history. It was fundamental in shaping the development of both New South Wales and Australia.

The meeting was opportune and the discussion fruitful. It was generally agreed to keep the lines of communication open and to meet as required. As a result of the meeting there needs to be:

(a) a watching brief on the Lands Building Collections Management Plan; and,
(b) a clear and concise justification for support of the Lands Proposal in regard to current trends in Australian history;
(c) a continued need to seek NSW Government support generally, and access to government artefacts, in particular.

Further, coming out of the meeting, it is proposed to prepare material and train guides for regular tours of the Lands Building.

If you have not already downloaded the Lands Proposal Submission, visit the ISNSW web site and, under “other groups”, click on to the “Friends of the Lands Department” and then open the Submission.

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