

## **An Interpretation Plan for Claremont Museum**

(Denise Cook, Claremont Museum: written for *Musing*, Museums Australia (WA)'s newsletter.)

Claremont Museum has been established for 30 years and has well-developed policies, collection management practices, displays about Claremont's history, extensive local studies information files, a well-regarded education programme and a well-provenanced collection. We generally have as many school bookings as we can take but our visitor and researcher numbers could definitely use improvement. We are also located in a great park on the river but the scores of people who take their children to the park rarely visit the Museum.

We decided to use the opportunity of doing an interpretation plan to provide us with a hand with our marketing too. In the end our hard-working consultants made recommendations about storage, funding, staffing and volunteers as well.

I had met Peter Kenyon from the Bank of I.D.E.A.S. at his organisation's 'Heritage in the Past Lane' seminar in 2003. I was impressed with his approach towards communities caring for their heritage and as well as using heritage to build both a stronger sense of community and a better economic base. I was keen to see what he would suggest for Claremont and Claremont Museum. I greatly respect Lorraine Fitzpatrick's extensive knowledge of museums and interpretation plans and was keen for her to give a museum perspective to this project. We were lucky enough to secure both of them for the interpretation plan.

A key element in our process was a series of nearly twenty focus groups or meetings with stakeholders, including Museum staff, volunteers, Councillors, key Council staff, Council's Museum and Heritage Advisory Committees, community groups, the Friends of Claremont Museum, Indigenous leaders, members of the Town's Youth Advisory Council, people with a particular interest in our Mews Boat Shed and Claremont Signal Cabin, teachers and people who use the adjoining park. At these meetings Peter gave an overview of Claremont's extensive heritage, as well as a summary of the key objectives of the Museum, Friends of the Museum and Council. We then talked about what we value about Claremont Museum, what is vital to keep, what we might change and the role that the Museum could play in preserving and promoting Claremont's heritage in the future.

In between these meetings and over the following months, the consultants discussed the new ideas that were emerging with Museum staff. They took the approach that they wanted to write an interpretation plan that staff would support, champion and put into action. I think that was really important because it has resulted in a plan with recommendations that we are keen to implement.

Once the plan was at draft stage, many of the people who had participated in the initial consultation came for a wine and cheese feedback session. In addition, we held another meeting for Councillors and senior Council staff where we discussed the outcomes and financial implications of the plan.

Some of the key interpretation recommendations are:

- Formal recognition for a museum without walls – interpretation of stories to be placed in the most appropriate location around Claremont, not just at the Museum;
- The Town should pursue a policy that any redeveloped space or building incorporates interpretation of its past uses;

- The Town should negotiate with the developers of the new Town Centre to facilitate small exhibitions and artwork relating to Claremont's history being incorporated within the development.

The plan has subsequently been adopted by Council with very positive feedback. I have been encouraged to request substantial additional funds for interpretation and improved storage in our next budget (although that hasn't been approved yet!). I think that the prospect of additional funding is a very positive outcome of this. However, I believe that the process has been just as important, because it meant that many people came together to talk about Claremont's heritage and the Museum's role in caring for and promoting it, which means that we now have a much wider network of enthusiastic supporters, including those in key roles in Council.