

Guest Speaker: Jenny Horder Head of Learning Services, Australian Museum Subject: Australian Museum – Past Present and Future.

Introduced by Ray Hyslop, Jenny through the use of various photographic and website pages gave us a very enthusiastic, informative and comprehensive presentation on the transition through time of the development and community use of the museum. Jenny has a science degree and is trained as a teacher and has been at the museum for a number of years.

One of our oldest cultural institutions, the museum was first established in the 1860's on its present site in College St, Sydney with the building of the Lewis Wing. It commenced as a kind of "show and tell" by scientists/researchers of their journeys, collections and restorations. There was a need found to let others see these collections and the museum developed to be half dedicated to research and the other half to public exhibitions.

Over the ensuing decades further buildings were added to the Lewis Wing until the museum reached its present configuration in 1963. The museum is a heritage building and has recently been restored to display its original architecture.

The earlier exhibits were for viewing only but over time the exhibits became more interactive with technological facilities to enable button pushing and more recently touch response. The earlier "dioramas" have been dismantled with only one remaining. Use of photographs for exhibition purposes has increased.

The museum has developed many community programs over time with one of the oldest being the "Museum in a Box" which involves sending material on a range of subjects in a box to various schools around NSW. That program is now being expanded to the community generally through libraries etc. Other initiatives are the Jurassic Lounge which involves late night opening of the museum to encourage the 18-35 age group to visit the exhibitions; early learning experiences for under 5 children (very popular with parents/grandparents); artists in residence; video conferencing for up to 10 schools to enable discussion on a particular subject or range of subjects; event association- e.g. recycling non clothing material into clothing; science programs such as "buy wise"; a public query facility through phone or email and the development of a very interactive website which provides research, search and discovery information. Jenny encouraged us to use the website.

The museum now relies heavily on volunteers to support the daily public access to the museum. The resident scientists usually now have to obtain research grants to maintain their position. The museum does receive State/Federal grants but must now also rely heavily on fund raising as traditional funding through government has been reduced.

David Barnett summed up the appreciation of all present for Jenny's most comprehensive and informative address and encouraged us all to take another look at our Australian Museum if we had not visited there recently.