



Remediation of Sydney's most iconic clock tower has commenced

The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts has commenced the final phase of its heritage remediation programme at The Fullerton Hotel Sydney

Media Release - SYDNEY, 15 JULY 2020: Following the conclusion of phase one of The Fullerton Hotel Sydney's façade remediation of the former Sydney General Post Office (GPO), maintenance and remediation work on the historic clock tower has commenced and is expected to be completed in December.

"As custodians of heritage, The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts believes it's imperative that significant historical buildings such as the GPO retain their heritage features. We also want to share the Grand Dame's unique story with everyone who visits the Hotel. Our initial investigation into the clock tower's history has already unearthed some great memories from former workers at the GPO," said Cavaliere Giovanni Viterale, General Manager of The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts.

During the final phase of the remediation programme, special attention will be paid to the clock tower's external stone and metal work, intricate windows and doors, as well as lead weathering and waterproofing. An expert team will use steam, water and specialist brushes to remove many years of accumulated layers of pollution to clean and preserve the clock tower.

The clock tower's colourful history

For decades, Australia's first GPO building featured prominently in the Sydney streetscape and skyline, and housed what was considered Sydney's most important timepiece. The clock tower was used to report the weather, with flags raised to warn people of weather changes. Flags were also hoisted for special occasions such as the celebration of royal birthdays and other major events.

The clock tower has a fascinating history starting in 1885 when the clock tower bells came under intense scrutiny due to their weight. Prior to the final installation by clockmaker Henry Daly, a certificate had to be obtained from Lord Grimthorpe – a horologist responsible for the design of the highly accurate regulator incorporated in the clock of the British Houses of Parliament, known colloquially as Big Ben. During his career, he took part in the design of more than 40 clocks, including that in St. Paul's Cathedral. Finally, on 16 September 1891, the chimes were set in motion and the bells rang across central Sydney for the first time

From 1891 until his retirement forty years later, Henry Daly would ring the GPO bells daily. To do this, he would watch the ball drop on Observatory Hill and listen for the gun fire from Pinchgut Island (now Fort Denison) that announced it was 1pm, which was also a signal for ship captains on the harbour to set their chronometers. To reach the clock tower chimes, Daly had to walk up 240 steps via a spiral staircase. The spiral staircase remains today and its maintenance will be part of the remediation process being conducted by The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts.

The GPO remained Sydney's most well-known landmark until the Sydney Harbour Bridge was erected in 1932. In 1942, the clock tower was dismantled for fear of it being targeted during WWII. It is believed that during this time, Australian soldier and reformed alcoholic Arthur Stace who gained fame by spreading his message of "Eternity", wrote the now famous word 'Eternity' inside the clock tower bells, when they were stored for safe keeping. The word is still visible today inside the main clock tower bell and is believed to be the only surviving script by Stace's own hand.



Trevor Somerville, former parcel sorter at the GPO, remembers his ventures up to the GPO clock tower. “Absolutely everything about the building was magical to me. We would often go up there to have lunch. It was a lovely view from up there, it could have been the highest point in Sydney in those days, when there were no high-rise buildings,” reminisces Trevor.

Today, the clock tower has come to represent remarkable architecture and engineering. With extensive experience preserving similar historic buildings in The Fullerton Heritage precinct in Singapore, The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts is committed to the conservation of the Sydney GPO building for future generations and was careful to choose reputable and experienced professionals to work on the final phase of the project.

The remediation project team and logistics

Experienced local heritage structural engineers Shreeji Consultant is responsible for overseeing the clock tower’s preservation. Equipped with extensive conservation and remediation experience, the team has worked on several prestigious buildings and major local heritage projects including the Strand Arcade and the Queen Victoria Building.

Rick Timperi from Stonemason & Artist will carry out the laborious chemical-free cleaning process, along with a team of trained specialists who will use steam, water and specialised brushes to remove accumulated layers of pollution without altering the sandstone’s natural patina ;preserving the clock tower’s integrity.

The last time the clock tower was cleaned was in 1963. Peter Bayfield was a teenager when he witnessed the cleaning and he recalls: “There was always a big pile of stones outside the telephone exchange, as high as a two-storey building. It was dirty and green and had been there for 20 years, but I never knew what it was.”

“One day, an area directly opposite the telephone exchange was fenced off and small trucks turned up to transport the stones to be cleaned with needle guns. Each block of stone was numbered, with a method of how it was stacked to make it easier to construct. The work seemed to go on forever as it was mostly manual, and the workers were only cleaning up to four stones a day, when there were hundreds,” he continued.

“I would always ask my mother if we could go and watch the GPO being constructed, it was so unique to be in that situation. These days you can’t miss the clock tower, and whenever I find myself in the city, I always made a point of trying to go and see it,” Bayfield added.

The clock tower remediation project is expected to conclude by December 2020.

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For all media enquiries - including images, please contact:

Karyn Primmer or Yasmin Collins

Director of Sales and Marketing and Marketing Communications Manager

Phone: +61 2 8223 1120/ +61 2 8223 1169

karyn.primmer@fullertonhotels.com or yasmin.collins@fullertonhotels.com



THE FULLERTON HOTEL
SYDNEY

About The Fullerton Hotel Sydney

The Fullerton Hotel Sydney, a luxury five-star hotel located in Sydney's historic GPO building at No. 1 Martin Place (formerly The Westin Sydney), officially opened its doors on 18 October 2019. The opening of The Fullerton Hotel Sydney marked the first international expansion of The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts, which owns and operates two award-winning hotels in Singapore - [The Fullerton Hotel Singapore](#) (opened in 2001) and [The Fullerton Bay Hotel Singapore](#) (opened in 2010).

Committed to its role as a custodian of heritage, The Fullerton Hotels and Resorts brand is renowned for its dedication to preserving buildings and their stories. This tradition has continued with The Fullerton Hotel Sydney, which shares a rich heritage with its sister hotel, The Fullerton Hotel Singapore (also a former GPO).

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