

Case for new replica Mace in the House of Representatives

Original Need

Old Parliament House is a nationally listed heritage building and the House of Representatives is a key space within the building. A replica mace occupies a prominent position on the central table of this chamber. When the building was first opened again to the public, a replica of the actual mace at Australian Parliament House was seen as important to the formation of the Old Parliament House Collection. Such a replica was agreed to by the Speaker in 2003, and the Speaker approved an appropriate design with some detail necessarily varied from the actual mace such as the deletion of the Royal Cipher of George VI. This design includes an outline of Old Parliament House on the rim of the crown. This replica was funded by the federal government as a formal replica for the cost of some \$235,000 and created by the makers of the actual mace. It was delivered in 2004 and is now secured in the Speaker's Office in Old Parliament House.

Use

A replica mace for display on the central table of the House of Representatives is a symbol of a Parliament chosen by a free people, to echo the words of Sir Robert Menzies. It is a key and highly relevant Learning object and visually it may be the most important item in the Chamber, as it strikes the eye on entry, followed by the Speaker's Chair. As a Learning tool it allows for a description of the history of Parliament, for the role of the head of state, and as the anchor piece for chamber interpretation. The replica has also been handled by members of the Museum Engagement team.

Authenticity

Subsequent use of the formal 2004 replica showed that, due to security requirements, it was too expensive for day to day display in the House of Representatives. Accordingly, since 2004 there have been three subsequent replicas on display in the House of Representatives, secured perhaps in 2005, then 2008, then 2013. The 2008 and 2013 were slight improvements on the 2005 version. None of these replicas use enough detail to show the outline of the façade of Old Parliament House on the rim of the crown or other such features of the formal replica. The 2005 and 2008 versions are held in storage by Learning and the 2013 is still on display in the Chamber.

The 2005 replica was very generalised in shape, sprayed with automotive gold paint, minimised detail, and did not convey an air of authority.

The 2008 replica was created by theatrical prop company GrindFX. It resembles the shape of the formal 2004 replica in a general sense, but completely lacks detail, and in fact uses convenient substitute elements to save detailed work. For example, the finely molded lion's heads on the formal replica appear much smaller on the 2008 replica because this detail was not modelled or molded, but obtained by using the heads from rubber toy lions found in a toy shop.

The 2013 replica used the 2008 replica as a model, with the addition of gold leaf, so it had a much improved appearance but still lacked detail. It was made of Ewin Wood of Natural History Productions, a professional maker of museum quality work.

None of these replicas pay due homage to the actual mace, to the design decisions by the Speaker of the House, or to the mace's role as a symbol of the authority of the Head of State or the people.

Current Need

The 2013 replica is very worn after seven years of handling. Areas have worn down to the underlying resin and it has lost most of the gold leaf lustre. It no longer functions well as the centre-piece of the chamber. Its generalised form, modelled on a theatrical prop interpretation of the formal replica, will not serve an improved display of the central table of the chamber. Even a casual inspection shows the lack of detail. Any interpretation of this replica as containing the approved design variations such as the outline of Old Parliament House will be flawed.

A New Replica Mace

A new replica to fulfil the promise of the central display can be created by the maker of the 2013 replica, Ewin Wood of Natural History Productions. Since 2013, this maker has created Learning replicas of the maces of the Parliaments of New South Wales and South Australia. For these replicas, he has pioneered new cold-molding non-invasive techniques using flexible silicone modelling that allows for the accurate capture of detail before gold leaf is applied. A much more accurate and detailed replica is now possible to fulfil the promise of the chamber, to capture the eye, and to accurately serve interpretation.

As part of research for supplying this need, a number of Australian museum and prop makers were contacted, but Ewin Wood is the only maker to have responded positively and appropriately. His quote includes a site visit to capture the detail of the formal replica using the cold-molding non-invasive techniques described.