

NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

‘Millers Point Oral History Project’

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE:	Harold Kerr
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INTERVIEWER:	Frank HEIMANS
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Note: The opinions expressed in this oral history interview are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily represent in whole or in part the position of the Department of Housing, the Government Architect's Office, the Department of Commerce or the Oral History Consultants.

00:01 START OF TAPE MP-FH25, SIDE A

00:02 Tape Identification

Harold, just for people who are listening to this particular interview, can you give me your full name?

00:31 My name is Harold Kerr.

Is that the Polish derivative of it?

It is an abbreviation of my father's surname, which is Zucker.

Really, sugar?

Exactly. Shortly after he came to Australia after unfortunate pronunciations of that name he decided to abbreviate it and it became Kerr, so we became family Kerr.

Much easier to remember for Australians, isn't it.

Very much easier.

01:02 *So you were born in Poland, which year was that?*

I wasn't born in Poland, I was born in Sydney. I was born at the Royal Hospital for Women at Paddington, Sydney in 1939.

Give me a little background about your family and how they came to come to Australia.

01:20 My father had been ferrying illegal immigrants into Palestine from Poland from about 1932 until about 1936 and on his sixth mission the vessel was caught by the British and held out at sea for a couple of weeks and he and his two assistants stayed on board with the people that they'd been hoping to land in Palestine. Shortage of water, shortage of food, a lot of stress and he developed duodenal ulcers. A year or so later his doctors in Poland suggested that the best cure that he could find would be a change of living environment, climatic environment, reduce the stress. My mother's sister and brother-in-law had migrated from Poland to Australia in the late 1920s and they arranged the necessary papers and my parents came to Australia in 1938.

Which was a good time to get out of Poland.

02:36 They were very, very lucky. Very lucky indeed because all the family who remained in Poland were lost. My father was one of eight children and the other seven and his parents and aunts and uncles and all the family died during the Holocaust. My mother's family was a little more fortunate because one brother had migrated to Palestine very much earlier and one sister had migrated to Australia, so of the six children three survived, but the rest of the family were in fact lost.

Looking back from the perspective of history and hindsight how does it affect you, that you

know that so many people had gone that you never had a chance to meet?

03:39 It is very hard to develop a real perspective of this because it is a little bit larger than the mind can cope with. One thinks about it quite often, but it is just something out there in the ether that one can't really grasp, that this sort of thing really did happen and one's own family were involved.

Tell me a little bit about your father, what kind of a person was he?

04:08 My father came from a very religious Jewish family living in a small town, Keltzer, in Poland and rebelled against religion and the family at a fairly early age and became a Zionist and went to Palestine. Was an athletic type, I believe, he played competitive soccer, was a cyclist competitively as well, was an adventurer, hence the shipping of illegal immigrants through the British blockade into Palestine, who ultimately shortly after he came to Australia became a poultry farmer, so a dramatic change of life. By training he was actually a knitting machine mechanic and that was his first job when he came to Australia. He worked for his brother-in-law who had a knitting factory here in Sydney and he worked there for a short period of time. Then became a tobacconist, he and my mother had a tobacconist shop in Rozelle. Shortly after that became poultry farmers and moved to the country, at that time it was almost country - today it is very much in the centre of Sydney and it is called Wentworthville.

Poultry farming - was that something your father knew something about?

05:46 No it was brand new, he didn't mind taking on something new and something different. No this was all new to him, he seemed to have learnt quickly, he ran a very successful poultry farm, a lot of innovation. I believe the Department of Agriculture used to come to visit quite regularly because he developed cooling systems to cover the dramatic loss of chickens that poultry farmers used to have during heatwaves at the time and he ran, apparently, quite a successful farm which we stayed on until 1946. Oh correction - we actually came to Sydney at the end of 1945.

From Wentworthville.

06:34 Well the trip from Wentworthville to the city in those days was a day's journey, or considered as a day's journey, it was a major exercise. I guess that had something to do with petrol rationing and all sorts of other things, one didn't move around quite as easily as today and probably the roads weren't quite the same either.

I am sure. So which schools did you attend Harold?

06:58 I went to Newington College. I spent the first term of my schooling here in Sydney at Rushcutters Bay at St Canissis and then from second term, 1946, I went to Newington where I boarded until I finished Leaving Certificate in 1956.

Your father had a business by that stage didn't he, it was called Moda, tell me a little bit about that.

No, no, no, Moda was actually an invention of mine later on. After being a poultry farmer he became a clothing manufacturer, again a new venture I guess, more closely related to knitting machines than poultry were. He established a new business making cut and sewn garments and also he and my mother had a dress shop on the corner of the Royal Arcade in Pitt Street in Sydney. Actually that came just shortly before the clothing business, that came very shortly after they came to Sydney and then the manufacturing and wholesale business started a very short time afterwards. The name of the shop in Pitt Street was Majestic Robes.

What kind of robes were they making?

08:37 I don't remember a lot about them except a do remember a fabric called Donegal was extremely popular at the time and all sorts of garments were made in that fabric. But beyond that I don't remember very much, except that my mother worked in the shop with several other people who helped there as well. My father used to stand outside the shop until he developed the manufacturing business, which was set up in the Piccadilly Arcade across the road.

It sounds like your mother was a bit of an entrepreneur as well, was she?

09:15 No I couldn't really classify her as an entrepreneur, she was someone who coped with a very dramatic change of lifestyle, coming from Europe. She was the daughter of a dentist and led a fairly protected life and was horrified at the thought of moving to a poultry farm where she actually lived at ground level, having lived in an apartment all her life until that stage. But she was a willing helper and did her job very well.

You are lucky that you have been born into such an interesting family, I think.

Well I guess it is my luck that I was born at all, considering what happened to others and yes I've been very fortunate.

What were your sort of dreams and ambitions as a young man, what did you want to do

with your life?

10:21 I never had any particular drive in any direction, I liked fiddling and trying out all sorts of bits and pieces. My parents were very keen that I should seek a profession and preferably become a doctor of medicine and at school. Contrary to the advice of the boarding house master at school, who was also our economics master, they insisted I go to university and study medicine, which lasted for a year and bit, but that is another story.

So what did you do after medicine?

10:56 A little bit of dentistry and then after that a little bit of accounting. After that travelled overseas for a couple of years and then returned and settled down then to the business community.

Did you start your own business?

11:17 Initially when I came back to Australia in 1963 I found my father had had a heart attack, so I was actually looking after the family business at that point, but then developed another business within the business, as it were. You mentioned the name Moda before and that is where that started.

So what was Moda actually?

11:45 Moda was an importing company importing knitwear, mainly ladies' knitwear, from Hong Kong and from Taiwan to Australia and then distributing, wholesaling that product.

Now following on from the time you had your own business you eventually came to live in Millers Point, what prompted the move to Millers Point?

12:17 The children had grown up, we were living at Vaucluse at the time, the children had grown up and Kate and I were rattling around in a place which was much larger than we needed. We had decided with our next door neighbour, who was in exactly the same position, that we would look for another place to live where again we could be next door neighbours. We almost bought something in Glebe, but then changed our mind, and our next door neighbour, our friend, suddenly turned up one day and said, 'I think I have found the place.' This was at the time that the Esso Building was being converted into Highgate, as it is known now. She had a prospectus for the building, the geography was absolutely wonderful, being located on the edge of the city within easy walking distance of everything, it was a very attractive spot on

the side of the harbour, easy walking to the Opera House, to whatever one wanted, and appeared to be ideal, so we decided to buy apartments next door to each other here as well, which we did.

Did you buy it off the plan, so to speak?

13:48 Yes it was bought off the plan. It was I guess a couple of years or more before the building was finished and that gave us time to see the last of our pets through before we moved from Vaucluse to Highgate. Then at the end of 1995 we moved here.

How did you find living in the inner city after you had been, say in Vaucluse on the ground so to speak and here you were quite high up in an apartment building - did you adjust easily to it?

14:27 I found it easier than Kate, because Kate had never lived in an apartment in her life. I had because with my parents we had always lived in apartments, or flats I think is the word that should be used. Kate found it very difficult, but there was an offset, we had another property outside of Sydney where she could actually put her feet on the ground and sort of rub her toes in the dirt as often as she wanted to, so that made it possible. If not for that, no it would not have worked.

So you need that contact with the ground, so to speak.

Yes I think so, I think it is very necessary.

Okay. So what did you find interesting about the Millers Point community and about living here?

15:11 That is something that evolved, it wasn't something that was part of our decision to move here because we knew absolutely nothing about Millers Point at the time. A little bit of history, more about The Rocks rather than Millers Point specifically. We selected to come here really because of the geography and the thought of the ease of splitting our life between two places, of having an apartment that could be closed up and go away without a garden to look after in Sydney and everything else, it was that sort of thing that brought us here. Gradually one came to know other people within the building and gradually that expanded to other people within the community. The one thing that we did learn early on is that there was an incredible sense of community around Millers Point, the cohesion between these people that we met was absolutely remarkable and that is something that developed and developed.

You would have been considered as a bit of a 'blow-in' as the locals call it wouldn't you.

16:28 Well very much so, we are still blow-ins now, we have been here for about ten years, but still we are newcomers. If you think about it there are just so many people here who have either lived their whole lives, or almost their whole lives here and are now at this stage what one might call elderly. There are people who are the third and fourth generation living in the area, we are definitely blow-ins. But interestingly the community has expanded and we are collectively talking about many people who live in a number of the high-rise buildings here now who have become part of the community and work with the community for the benefit of the community.

Now what was it Harold that prompted you to take a bit more of an active interest in the community and how you did get to meet them? Normally people in ivory towers such as Highgate wouldn't mix too much with public housing tenants.

17:30 It is a little unfair to call Highgate an ivory tower, Highgate is a very unusual place because it is a community within itself and I think this is very unusual for a high-rise apartment building. I am told by people who have lived in other apartment buildings here in Sydney, in Australia, people who have done so in other parts of the world as well, that this was pretty well unique. The developer, in the process of selling the building talked about a vertical village and I have a firm belief that this was a sales ploy, but it really did become a vertical village. A number of the people who moved in at the very beginning felt that there should be social activity of all kinds. Early on a number of the ladies found that the wives of many people who came to Sydney from overseas with their husbands who were working on contracts for three months, or six months, or sometimes twelve months in Sydney were suddenly landed in a place where they knew absolutely no one, had no family, had no friends and felt that they could do something to make these peoples lives a little more comfortable. They formed something called the Coffee Club, which initially used to meet once a week and invited anyone to come along and people got to know each other. This expanded into a variety of other social events that then started to involve the other buildings.

19:16 From the Coffee Club came the Kent Street Connection and a variety of social events were created and people really did get to know each other. It is the sort of building where you step into the lift and the odds are that you are going to meet someone that you know in that lift and you are going to have a chat on the way

down, you are not staring blankly at the numbers as they reduce.

So it is a bit like a village in itself, you mean.

19:45 It is a village in itself and the level of activity that goes on is remarkable. These activities also involve fund raising for community establishments. For example, we have an aged-care facility called Darling House in Millers Point, which in itself is a very special place, now I'd like to mention this afterwards if I could, and many functions are held, for example, to raise funds to support Darling House. We have a children's tennis club that was established by a mixture of people from the high-rise end here and the other end of Millers Point which requires funds and again activities are held to fund raise for these. This goes on and on and on, it is never ending, it is a very interesting exercise.

Now something prompted you to take an active role, I think it was in the late 1990s, when the State Government wanted to sell off some land behind this building. Can you tell me all the circumstances leading up to that?

21:06 In the second or third year that we were living in Highgate I joined the executive committee of the building and through that became involved with a fight, I suppose, against the State Government because they were selling off a site in Hickson Road immediately to the west of Highgate, and not only to the west of Highgate but also to the west of Georgia and Stanford, the other buildings to the south of Highgate. A development application was lodged for that particular site with a fifty-two metre tall building immediately to the west of Highgate, which meant that roughly half of Highgate would be covered with another building only a few feet away, which was not truly appropriate not only because of the protection of people's views but also it wasn't in keeping with the heritage area that it was being built in and we felt that something should be done about it. I guess it was a mixture of altruistic and more personal views by many people in that, but it became a major exercise that went on for at least a couple of years, or more than two years, with many meetings at the CSPC, the Central Sydney Planning Committee, and involved making a number of submissions, including heritage submissions. From the heritage side I got to meet the then Assistant Director of the Heritage Office and started to learn a little bit more about the area at large and the involvement really grew from that.

So tell me a little bit about what the impact, apart from the height and the losing of some of the views, what impact would this fifty-two metre building have had on Millers Point as a

whole do you think, if it had been built in that form?

23:35 It would have obscured sight lines, it was disproportionate to the other heritage buildings adjacent to it, it just should not have been put into the locality, it is as simple as that. The precinct is a very special one. Through the process of being involved with the a heritage consultant and then with the Heritage Office I guess I just learnt a lot more about the Millers-Dawes Point precinct and also in the process discovered that it was largely unprotected. This is something that came up at one of the meetings at the Heritage Office and I started to try to learn more about this and ultimately decided after the Hickson Road exercise had finished that it would be a very worthwhile thing to do, to try and have Millers and Dawes Point listed as a single entity on the State Heritage Register, which we then proceeded to do and was successful in achieving this result.

I will come to that a little bit later, but first I'd like to know what you managed to influence in terms of this development, how you managed to influence that development.

25:01 We had one major influence on the ultimate building that went up and is now the building that houses Lend Lease and that is that we had the height reduced from fifty-two metres to thirty-three metres for the bulk of the building. It was still a little bit higher than we would have liked to have seen because our feeling was that the building should not be higher than the stone walls in Hickson Road, or even the height of the top of the terraces in High Street, a sort of a maximum of about twenty-two metres or twenty-three metres. But it was a happy compromise and the result was certainly an acceptable one.

So what were the steps in order to gain this reduction to thirty-three metres? Tell me a bit about the story, about the kind of machinations that went on to try and get to that thirty-three metres.

26:07 It was a series of submissions and appearances at CSPC meetings and presentations at these meetings. This was not something that was just carried by the, shall we say, high rise community in Millers Point, but this was a general community activity and I think we were really successful because of the enormous amount of work that was put into it and the assistance given to us by the Millers Point community at large. The community at that time was led by a lady called Shirley Ball, who unfortunately is now deceased, who in a way was the heart and soul of Millers Point, was certainly the power of Millers Point. She worked closely with us, as did all

of the other people who regularly attend the Residents Action Group within the area. When we went to the CSPC, to the Town Hall, for these meetings it was not two or three of us, or a dozen of us going from the high-rise - we filled bus-loads and they came from the broader community because they too genuinely felt that what was proposed was not satisfactory, not desirable. Probably even more important than that, because there was certainly less impact on their position than on the high-rise buildings, they felt that the high-rise people were part of their community and they wanted to assist, and they did. This is really what has happened, it has become one large community and I think you used the word silvertails or something before and it is now largely irrelevant, people are accepted as people, as residents of Millers Point, and they work together.

28:26 END OF TAPE MP-FH25 SIDE A

28:29 START OF TAPE MP-FH25 SIDE B

Now the people that were at the forefront of trying to limit this development - which of course must have set a precedent, I suppose in the region - who were they? I mean were they basically you, were you the main instigator, or were there others?

28:51 Two of us from Highgate were deeply involved, Ray Newey, who was the chair at the time of the Highgate Owners Corporation Executive Committee, and he and I worked together on this as far as Highgate was concerned. The other buildings also had people who were working in the same direction. Some of the buildings worked together, some of the buildings at that stage worked independently. But I guess Ray and I were the main instigators, let us put it this way, but again gained the support of many, many other people here.

Was it easy or was it fairly difficult to gain the support of the community about this particular development, limiting it to thirty-three metres?

29:53 I don't think there was any difficulty at all. The community saw that there was a problem and the community came together. You know if you had gone to a CSPC meeting and you looked up into the gallery it was full, and I mean full, of Millers Point people and they were rowdy too sometimes. Frank Sartor was the Lord Mayor and

when he sort of went off track sometimes they let him know.

There has been some recent publicity about Mr Sartor.

Yes indeed.

Now the idea to get the whole of Millers Point heritage listed - that was a fairly novel one, how come this hadn't been done up to that point before? You would have thought that they might have thought about that.

30:46 It had certainly been thought about because it was not my idea, the thought was fed to me by the then assistant director of the Heritage Office, a gentleman by the name of Rhys McDougal. At one of the meetings we had out there when we were talking about Hickson Road just as an off-hand comment he said to me, 'When this is over if ever you are interested it could be a good thing to look at the listing.' I think the reason it wasn't done, and the Heritage Office obviously had it in mind and I don't know how long they had considered it and I know that Shirley Ball, for example, had thought for a long, long time about greater protection for Millers Point; or I learnt this a little later on; but as far as Rhys McDougal is concerned the Heritage Office just doesn't have the resources to be able to cover absolutely everything that they feel necessary. So we took it on here and we resourced it in the sense that we funded the necessary submissions that had to be made and these funds came from the entire community. There were dollar donations from pensioners in the area and there were thousand dollar donations from other entities as well and we collected something like \$20,000 and used these fund to prepare the submissions. But it was a long haul to reach that particular point.

Who was the heritage consultant that you paid to do this submission? (Pause)

I think you mentioned to me earlier it could be a man called Graham Brooks, was it?

I think you are right, Graham Brooks.

Who was Graham Brooks?

I am just trying to think how I met Graham Brooks in the first place to be honest. I guess that we must have been looking for heritage consultants when the Hickson Road exercise was on but I'm not sure who actually introduced me to him, but I met Graham. Graham is a specialist, he has a firm employing quite a number of people just doing that one thing, doing heritage submissions and heritage reports for whoever needs them. He again was one of the people who supported us very heavily from the start and advised us and taught us, which is also very important, a lot about

the area and the significance of the area at the time.

Now the Department of Housing, their properties, were they already heritage listed, the private housing and the public housing there?

33:45 The situation before the listing of Millers and Dawes Points as a single entity was that the Department of Housing had done quite a lot of work and there were some hundred and ten, hundred and twelve, hundred and thirteen, individual listings on the register. But this meant that these individual properties and their immediate curtilage were protected, but nothing else was. Things of, shall we say, extreme importance such as Observatory Hill, the area where the old Fort Street School stands, the old Metrological building, all of that, all of the areas within the Cahill Expressway, none of this was actually protected. This really became quite a concern because with governments wanting to sell off land and do all sorts of things there could have been more damage done to Millers Point.

34:56 If you look at Millers Point today there is only a tiny fraction of the original that stands. If you look at it from the air, if you look at a map, there are only a handful of streets and rows of terraces that remain and they are very, very precious. Millers Point was in fact the first village in Australia and it was established because of the maritime activity that started in this area. Labour was needed and people had to live close by and the village was established and what is left of it today, what we have, we really want to hold on to.

So it was a very important thing that you did there in having it heritage listed. How did the Heritage Office first respond to the idea?

35:43 Oh the Heritage Office initiated the idea, let's be truthful - they seeded the idea and that seed grew. But there were some difficulties in having the seed really come to maturity and the greatest difficulty at the time, I hate to say this, was a name that came up a few moments ago and that was the Lord Mayor of the time, Frank Sartor, who appeared to have been totally opposed to the concept. I guess this might have something to do with the fact that the Heritage Office would jointly look after the area with the City Council at the time and any development application would become an integrated development application and things of that nature, and I suspect that maybe he did not like that concept. But we had general support for the listing from the government for quite a long time but we could not get the support from City Council. Shirley Ball had wonderful political connections and could open

doors very, very effectively and she did do so.

37:00 We sort of had meetings with the then Minister for Planning, Andrew Refshauge, and he supported the concept of this listing, but he said we required the co-operation of City Council because of the necessity of City Council then having to operate with the Heritage Office. We were unable to obtain that as long as Frank Sartor was down there. The government was behind it but the City Council was agin us and without the two of them we couldn't get there so it actually dragged on. What should have happened, hopefully, in six or nine months took some years to achieve, but ultimately Mr Sartor was to move to Macquarie Street, which opened an opportunity when we knew this was going to happen. His successor, Lucy Turnbull, was more co-operative and when we knew that Frank Sartor was about to leave we had another meeting with Andrew Refshauge and he suggested that Lucy, who was about to become Lord Mayor if and when Frank went which he obviously was going to do, would support it, we could go ahead.

38:20 So we met very quickly with Lucy Turnbull and she said yes. We went back to Andrew Refshauge so he said, 'Go.' The submissions were prepared, we had much assistance at that point from the Department of Housing because they had already done a lot of the research work that was necessary for the submission as it related to all the properties that they had already covered, which reduced our ultimate cost, it would have been a much bigger job. They provided us with all the records they had available and Graham Brooks brought this together with his own researchers, the submission went in and finally the Minister announced it and we were listed.

What year was that?

2003, I believe.

So that is a remarkable achievement I think.

39:17 It was good to see it done, it was good to see it done. I think everyone was happy. Shirley Ball was quite delirious at the time because she had dreamt of protection of that sort for a long, long time. I believe the whole community was quite excited about it.

Now what does it mean in actual terms, this heritage protection for Millers Point now?

39:39 Until quite recently it meant a lot more than it does now because the State

Government recently in relation to activities in the Redfern district have suggested that under certain circumstances they can override heritage listings. But in general it means that no development can take place without the authority of the Heritage Office and they are always going to take into consideration preservation of what there is and contain any unwanted development. So hopefully it means that the area will be preserved effectively as it is, help it to be maintained as it is, as a national treasure, which it really is.

Now does this heritage listing cover the docks as well? The foreshores where Patricks are going to be leaving next year?

40:40 No. We drew a line from day one excluding the wharves, Patricks wharves, because we realised this was far more sensitive and far more politically difficult and we thought it better to make sure that we should achieve a listing for all of Millers and Dawes Points and Observatory Hill and everything else that went with it and worry about the docks, the wharves, later. The wharves are of course a very important part of this heritage, because it is because of the wharves, not these wharves but the wharves that were there at the time probably more like jetties if you think about them today, were the reason for the establishment of Millers Point, the village of Millers Point. This is really the curtilage to the heritage precinct. So the concept was that once the listing was complete we would address the wharves as a new issue and see what could or could not be done. But the then Premier, Bob Carr, beat us to the draw because in October 2003 at the State Labor Party Convention he announced the ultimate closure of Sydney Harbour as a working harbour. Even though he denied that he was closing the working harbour in effect if you take all the cargo out of the harbour it is no longer a true working harbour. Of course this meant the ultimate sale of the wharves.

Now you are involved in a bit of a battle there too - tell me a bit about that.

42:29 Well this sort of threw us, caught us quite off-guard, to be honest, because we thought we could approach it very rationally and talk to a lot of people and see what could be done. That then had to be addressed as a far broader image because we weren't really looking at the preservation of something that stood, as we were with the heritage precinct, we were looking at what developers and the government and a lot of other people see as mile-high-stacks of million dollar notes and decided very quickly that this wasn't something that we could address as a community issue, it had

to be a broader issue, and we then went ahead and formed the Working Harbour Coalition, which involved larger entities than we were and a very diverse group. What we set out to do was to become, or to set up, a non-political diverse group that was concerned about the preservation of Sydney as a working harbour and also preservation of the publicly-owned land. Preservation in the sense of encouraging government not to sell this publicly-owned land because it was irreplaceable. That group consisted of a mixed group of bedfellows, if I can put it that way. The National Trust is involved, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), Asia-World Shipping Services, Sydney Harbour Maritime Forum, two city councillors and also of course the Millers Point-Dawes Point-The Rocks Resident Action Group.

What is the aim of the Working Harbour Coalition then, is it to save this area from having to move all the shipping out? Tell me exactly what the objectives are.

45:07 Well the government's plans involve transferring cargo that comes into Sydney Harbour now to Port Kembla, and ultimately some of that cargo will also go to Newcastle. At the present time something over ninety per cent of the cargo that is landed in Sydney Harbour reaches its final destination within about forty kilometres of the wharves. Transferring it to Port Kembla then means that some millions of tons of cargo per annum are going to be carted back to Sydney by road. It is not something we believe to be a rational thing to do. It has terrible social impacts if you think about the road traffic that is going to be involved, thundering through the suburbs as it were, clogging up the arterial roads. We estimate something like a hundred and fifty to a hundred and eighty thousand truck units per annum, truck movements per annum, would be involved in this, I think that works out to something approaching seven hundred a day. Not desirable from an environmental point of view, it is the last thing we need. It is going to add costs to everything, what was landed in Sydney Harbour is going to cost a little bit more than it cost before because it has got to be trucked further and handled more. So we totally oppose the concept of shutting down what is a very effective working harbour and taking it somewhere else for possible financial or political gain.

47:07 In addition to that, if these wharves are freed up it also then means that they are going to be sold off, they are going to be developed, which means the people have lost land that they own, irreplaceable land. We also consider that no one knows what the future need will be for these deep water billets within Sydney - we can't tell what

is going to happen in ten years, or twenty years, or thirty years, or fifty years and an irreversible move of this nature is totally illogical and should be opposed, and that is what we are trying to do.

So is the main thrust of it the sale of public land?

47:54 No that is one of the two thrusts. I believe there are two equal thrusts here. Thrust one is preserve that which belongs to the people. Thrust two is don't do something as illogical as moving goods away and then carrying them back unnecessarily.

Also of course Millers Point being a kind of maritime precinct would lose that particular status, wouldn't it?

48:21 Well that is the heritage side of it and I haven't mentioned that because as important as heritage is to me I think the preservation of the ownership of the public land and avoiding the impact upon society of carrying all these goods back to Sydney is possibly even more important. Yes these wharves are a part of Millers Point heritage and yes of course we want that, but we can go further if we want to talk about heritage. Sydney Harbour today is as wonderful as it is because of the mix of activities that take place on the harbour. If you start stripping these activities away and turn it into a mill pond, as it were, it becomes a different place and I think Sydney Harbour as it stands today is an extraordinary place.

That is a good enough reason. Did you get universal support by everyone for this particular approach, to try to keep the working harbour or were there some organisations opposed to it?

49:24 There are many organisations who would like to see it changed because if you think about it those who have immense financial benefit to reap from it naturally would like to see these changes take place. By the way I'm not only talking about developers, I guess the stevedores are going to benefit enormously as well. I guess the owners of the fleets of trucks that are going to be carrying things backwards and forwards are probably going to benefit. There are a variety of places that will benefit.

Now the former Premier, Bob Carr gave the people of New South Wales some assurances in 2003, that Port Jackson would remain as a working harbour, has anything changed now with the election of the new Premier?

50:13 Well in 2003 Bob Carr was talking about Sydney Harbour being a working harbour without all the roll-on-roll-off vessels that come in, without all the general

cargo vessels that come in, without the limited number of container vessels that come in, he was talking about a very different working harbour. What he was talking about is a working harbour that has ferries and a working harbour that has passenger ships and a working harbour that has oil tankers and a working harbour that has a variety of businesses that repair small vessels - this is a different sort of working harbour.

So what has changed? Why suddenly has this big change come across? What happened in the meantime?

51:09 What I am trying to say is that the working harbour that Bob Carr defined in 2003 was not what we would consider a working harbour. It would be stripped of the true cargo vessels, it would be a very different story. If you go back to 2000 you have a different story again - the government at that stage said that Sydney Harbour would remain a true working harbour with everything it has now indefinitely, but that changed.

A lot of changes, right. So the present Premier - is he opposed or is he on-side of keeping the working harbour?

51:52 To be honest we don't know what Mr Lemma is thinking about at the present time because Mr Lemma has refused to speak to the Working Harbour Coalition.
That is not a very good sign, is it.

52:06 No it is not a very good sign at all. One of the resolutions carried at the recent Town Hall function, or Town Hall Forum, that the Working Harbour Coalition held with some eight hundred people plus, down there, was that the Premier should meet a delegation from the Working Harbour Coalition, but we wrote to him and I received a phone call from his office last week saying that the Premier sent his apologies - however his diary was far too full for the coming few months to be able to arrange a meeting.

So this is the current issue that you are still involved in.

52:54 We are still deeply involved in this and the Working Harbour Coalition is starting on some new directions now that will hopefully make the government reconsider its position.

Just going to some final questions now - you've been in Millers Point for the last ten years how do you think living in Millers Point has influenced your life and your views?

53:22 Since I left school Millers Point is the first place I've been where there has

been a total sense of community, which I think is fabulous. As far as life views are concerned, I don't know whether it has changed life views, but it has changed my appreciation of how people can and do work together for their mutual benefit and I found this very, very important and very lifting, shall we say.

So on the whole it has been a very beneficial experience for you has it, living at Millers Point?

54:03 It has been a good experience. It has given me a lot of new interests, it has taught me an enormous amount, I've stepped into areas that I didn't know existed before and they keep expanding, they keep expanding. It leads one into meeting all sorts of wonderful people and it is a never-ending learning process.

That is great, that is really good. So what do you see as the future for Millers Point, say the next ten years - what do you think is going to happen here?

54:42 This is all subject to what happens on the Darling Harbour wharves and another issue has come up recently as well. The Department of Housing, I am led to believe has a change of policy coming up as to who the residents of the public housing in Millers Point and Dawes Point will be. We fear that this means that there will be a more transient population and many of the people who have lived in Millers and Dawes Point for a long time are going to be forced out. The public housing will no longer be public housing in the sense that I've understood it because many people who I don't believe can afford it are going to be forced to pay commercial rents. Commercial rents in this area, so close to the city and with harbour views are particularly expensive and if people on very limited incomes are suddenly being asked to pay five hundred dollars a week for a very small residence they are going to be forced to move. If this happens, and there are community moves just starting now to try and oppose this, this community could well be destroyed and that would be so sad. And again because a government is chasing money.

Well that seems like a note to finish our interview on. We will leave that to future historians then to ponder and we will see what happens in ten years time when they play this tape, perhaps, in future. Is there anything else you want to mention before we end it?

Nothing. Thank you for the opportunity of talking.

56:48 END TAPE MP-FH25 SIDE B AND END OF INTERVIEW WITH HAROLD KERR

