

NSW DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

‘Millers Point Oral History Project’

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE:	Flo Seckold
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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.

00:02 START OF TAPE MP-FH10 SIDE A

Tape identification

Now Flo could you tell me your full name.

00:26 Florence Mary Seckold.

Where and when were you born?

I was born down in Lower Fort Street, not in the house itself, in 1933, my parents lived down there.

What number Lower Fort Street?

I don't know if it was 19, but I know we did live in 33, I was a toddler then, when we were in 33.

So you moved once or twice, you think?

01:02 From there we went up to 57 Lower Fort Street. My father was in the Army, went to the Middle East, and mum finished up moving down into Harrington Street, 57, that was a bigger place, three bedrooms, because we were family of five, two brothers, myself and my parents. I lived down there until I was nineteen when I got married.

Now the very first house have you any memories of that?

01:28 No, no, no, only when I lived in 57. We were there probably I suppose a couple of years, three years, something like that.

Where did you move after that?

Down to 57 Harrington Street.

Same number, different street.

Yes that's right. No 50 Harrington Street, I made a mistake there, 50, that is part of The Rocks now we are talking about.

So how old would you have been when you got there and when you left?

Seven, and I was nineteen.

So you lived in Harrington from seven to nineteen and in Lower Fort Street from four to seven. Do you have any memories of that time?

02:10 No, no, not too much. The house in Lower Fort Street - I can remember the front door, was a very big heavy door. We used to play as children out in the back lane, there was an area down there that is referred today as the paddock, the children played in there. We were never allowed to play in there because it was a tip, broken bottles, whatever people wanted to throw over the fence, it was dangerous. So we used to play in that little back

lane out there because mum only had like a one room and a verandah that was like the kitchen, so there was all of us in the one room and the little verandah for a kitchen.

Where did you sleep?

02:54 We all slept in the one room. There was a cot, a single bed and a double bed, we never slept with our parents.

Just one room for a whole family, must have been very crowded.

03:09 Yes, it would have been very crowded. When mum got down into Harrington Street we all had a bedroom. The two boys had their bedroom, I had mine, the parents had theirs. There was a dining room downstairs, kitchen, nice backyard to play in. The only thing with that was the bathroom was down the back, a tin bath. If you wanted to have a bath you used to light the copper up and had to carry buckets of water down the stairs, so we didn't do that every day. My brother being the last one he used to sit in the copper because he was only tiny and that was still warm from the fire that was underneath.

It is almost unimaginable today, isn't it.

03:51 People wouldn't live like that and yet we had happy times down there, playing in the yard. If we didn't go to Sunday School or a Sunday we weren't allowed out, so we'd be sitting down there with our song book, *The Boomerang* and we'd be singing songs, entertained ourselves that way.

Sounds like a great childhood, actually.

It was.

You said when you wanted to have a bath you went into the little tin bath tub - where was that, in which room were you in?

04:21 As you walked out the kitchen you walked into a laundry and from there we went down eight stairs to the back yard and it was down there, at the bottom of the eight stairs. *So it was actually in the back yard that you had your bath?*

It wasn't all connected up, no. The toilet was there. If it had been raining you would get wringing wet, walking down there.

Did you have to carry the water as well?

I think my father did, or my mother, I can't remember carrying it down.

What did your father do?

04:50 Well he was English, came out here in the Depression years when I was born, or earlier than that I suppose, and he was a seaman. When mum and dad got married he was a

coal lumpers and that is what you had to be to live in this area in those times, anything associated with the waterfront. Then he joined the Army and went to the war, came back and went back to the waterfront. He died as a result of an accident on the wharves back in 1953.

Tell me about that accident.

05:22 Well, I was married then. He fell down the stairs, and they were tiny little stairs, not unlike what you see over there, he just slipped and fell and not a large area and he broke so many ribs on his right side, his left side, and I think there was only one rib in the whole of that area that wasn't broken or cracked so he suffered for a while in hospital.

This is working on the ships, is it?

Yes he was a wharf labourer.

Was it dangerous work they were doing?

05:58 Yes it was. At that particular time the wharves were uneven, the wooden structure where they walked along, and they had those big wheelbarrow things that went under your arms. That is how that happened, he fell on that.

Do you remember the day your father died?

Oh yes very vividly, it was 29th September 1953 and I was married not quite twelve months earlier.

How did you take the news?

06:28 Couldn't believe it, couldn't believe. That was our first episode of somebody dying in the family. Grandparents were dead, never knew them. Didn't know my father's parents. So that was a real hit home, that one.

How did your mother cope after that?

06:49 Well, she coped. She was pretty strong my mother, there wasn't very much of her she was only tiny and skinny but she coped. Had two brothers living at home then.

It is tough though, the main income has gone- did she go to work?

No, she had a pension. She never worked, she had what they now call cerebral palsy, her right-hand was a funny little hand. I often wonder how she managed us as children, dressing us as babies, doing all the jobs you had to do for them, but she was very capable cooking, washing and cleaning.

What is her background?

07:30 She was born in Darlington of Irish descent and she came down here when her

sister lived in High Street, down in Millers Point there. She lived with them for a while and then she met my father and they were going out together and got married and three kids later.

What about your father's background?

07:52 Don't know too much about him, he never spoke about it. Spoke about his mother, his brother came out during the war years, he was in the British Navy, had a sister, that is who I am called after. I said to mum, 'How would you give me an old-fashioned name like that?' and she said, 'Both your father and I liked it,' so that was that. My brothers' names were Tommy and David, they were good boys.

Now your father working as a coal lumper - it must have been very dirty work, do you remember him coming home?

08:25 Yes, with a black face and just pink lips, yes I do. Can't tell you too much about that. *Were there any strikes that he was part of?*

I don't think so in them days, I can't remember. I suppose there would have been.

Was he a unionist?

Well I should imagine he would be, I mean with those jobs you had to be union orientated.

Did he ever tell you how the jobs were allocated?

08:58 No, no, never spoke about it. He wasn't a super friendly man, can't ever remember sitting on his knee, no show of affection. My youngest brother did because he was the favourite.

So what was life like in Millers Point when you were growing up, try and explain it to me from your early memories?

09:25 From what I can remember it was a good life. We used to go up to the playground up in Cumberland Street to play, we were always up there. We didn't actually run the streets, there was none of that, occasionally we might. Used to play basketball up there and was a member of the basketball team. Netball, rounders. Learned how to knit and crochet and sew, pottery work. Loved it up there. Learned all that up at the playground. My mother couldn't knit and I think the sewing only meant mending. Pottery work we learnt up there, making vases and little bits and pieces at the King George V Playground. It was a good area, it is now a sports recreation centre up there. There was a male teacher and a female teacher and the northern end of the playground was for the girls and the little ones and the other end was for the boys. We had a lot of fun up there growing up.

So it would have been pretty safe there.

10:50 It was safe, the teachers were very capable teachers. They were rather strict, I know one time there I must have been cheeky so Miss Mann, her name was, and the male one was Skipper Turner, she marches down to my father and said I'd been naughty and I wasn't to go back to the playground for a week or two weeks and he went along with that. Yes, it was well controlled.

What about religious life, what was that like?

Well Sunday School. My mother was a Catholic, my father was Church of England and we took his religion because he said so, and we went to Sunday School and that's about it.

Do you remember much about Sunday School?

11:40 Just we used to get our little cards when we went. Christian Endeavour, we used to go that, that was a couple of doors up from home, and that was a sort of religious..... that is where Pearl Harvey can help you with that bit there, Christian Endeavour. Just the teachings, what you learn at those sessions, stories and all that sort of thing and it was good. We weren't brainwashed over it.

It wasn't dogmatic, I suppose. Now you told me earlier that you remember a fire at the Harbour Trust or something.

12:17 I can vaguely remember or whether it was because my mother told me about it. Where Grubb's butcher's shop was in George Street down there, is now the big Duty Free Shop, over to the right on an angle there was the Harbour Trust and the fire station, and yes, there was a big fire there. Now that might be just that mum told us about that, I wouldn't swear to that, might just have been able to remember there was a fire. But I remember the fire that was opposite where the Brooklyn Hotel is now, that was a car park, and next door to that there was Maccareath's and we used to buy our bird seed down there, that was a huge big fire there.

The shop went up, did it?

13:16 I think it was probably in that area because they were worried that it would have got to the petrol bowsters that were there, with the parked cars and all that, that was a huge big fire.

Do you know when it was, which year approximately?

13:30 I was probably about ten or thirteen, so that could have been around the mid-1940s.

You said your father served in the war - did he have any repercussions from that, did he have any bad memories or any wounds?

13:48 He never told us too much about it. He was never one to talk, like 'Sit down and do this and do that,' but not one to go into details about his Uncle Jack, or his Aunt Mary, or whoever. Nothing, not even about his life at sea.

Do you have any memories of the war at all?

14:13 Only one incident. I can remember when the sirens went on and all the lights went out and we had dark things at the windows to stop the lights - I must have wanted to go to the toilet this particular night and turned the light on. The next minute the warden knocked on the door, 'Turn the light out.' That is the only think I can remember. When the Japanese got into the Harbour mum said the next morning what had happened and she didn't bother to wake us up, she said if anything was going to happen we were all there together, that is how she looked at it.

Fatalistically. Now you went to Fort Street High School, did you?

Not the high school, the primary school.

How far did you get with your education?

I went to second year.

Of high school?

15:01 Yes, that was out at Surry Hills, Devonshire Street. There wasn't much attached to that, we sort of stayed with our own little group, didn't get to know anybody there.

Travelled backwards and forwards on the bus. They were reasonably good years, I can't recall anything that was nasty.

So you left school at about fourteen?

Fifteen.

Was that the average age that girls were leaving school in those days?

I don't know, I wasn't overly fussed on school.

Did you have any other interests, did you swim?

15:44 Always over in the North Sydney Olympic Pool. No great swimmer because my brother nearly drowned me one time, I can get to where I want to go but just don't touch me, or get near me.

How did you get to North Sydney pool - did you take a tram or something?

16:10 Yes I think it was sixpence, lucky if we got a shilling. We'd get the tram over the Bridge, go to the pool, we'd have a couple of pennies left from that, go into Luna Park, have a ride maybe and then walk back over the Bridge. We were very fit in those days, walk

back.

Walk back and spend all your money on the rides.

Yes, whatever rides you could get for a penny. So as often as we could get there we were there. My uncle used to come down on a Saturday and give us money to go to the pictures, so we didn't do too bad.

Sounds good. What was your favourite ride at Luna Park?

Might have been the big dipper in them days.

That has gone now, hasn't it. You can remember the house at Lower Fort Street, 57, what it looked like. Can you take me on an imaginary walk through it?

17:07 Well, we'd open the door and walk in, it was a very wide hall, foyer-type hall and go up so many stairs, there probably might have been about ten or eleven, and there was a landing and there was a room off there, it might have been the bathroom, I don't know. Then we'd go up another seven or eight stairs and then we'd go right into where we lived, into the little room, the flat.

How many rooms altogether did you have at Lower Fort Street?

17:34 We had the one big room and the kitchenette. I can't recall how many rooms there was in the place, it was a residential.

Who was the landlady?

Mrs Josephine Mary Spragg, it is a wonder I can remember that.

Was she tough?

17:52 No, not really, a kind lady, and a her husband. I don't remember too much about them, if you know what I mean, they were in their little flatette or whatever and we were in ours and I think we all lived in harmony.

What about Harrington Street, when you went to Harrington Street, what was that like? You had more space you say.

18:17 We had the space, yes. Plenty of stairs, like this place. Our neighbours were quite nice down there too, Pat Hopwood, she was then Law, she married the boy that lived on the other side of us, he was Neville Hopwood. Then there was us and Pat Hopwood and Mrs Sincotter and Mr and Mrs Carr. Then we had Joplin's the ink factory, it is now the Harrington Hotel, those five places there.

That was actually called The Rocks then, was it?

That's The Rocks, yes.

Did people refer to it as The Rocks and Millers Point?

18:57 No, Millers Point. I mean you'd address your mail that way. Even when we lived in Cumberland Street, when we were married it was 158 York Street North, Millers Point. Then when Sydney Cove came in it went back to the original name of The Rocks and it wasn't York Street then, it was Cumberland Street, that was originally the name of it.

What sort of facilities did you have in the house in Cumberland Street? What kind of stove was there in the kitchen?

19:32 How many layers of lino on the floor, about seven or eight, and about three pound of nails and tacks. They were nice big rooms, big ceilings, a staircase up, seven or eight stairs to a landing, and then went left and right to the bathroom and back bedroom, which my son had. We went right to my daughter's bedroom and our balcony bedroom. Then downstairs when you walked in it was a hall, off the left was the lounge room, you walked into the dining room and then out into the kitchen, which were all good sized rooms. The kitchen had a tiny little sink, probably about sixteen inches, with a board about as wide as what the sink was and you washed up there. There was no stove. There was fuel stove hanging out of where it should have been sitting in properly and the first night we were there we cooked our meal on a fireside heater.

20:28 There was an old chip heater up there that when lit would blow you out the door, dangerous. We didn't move upstairs straight away because there was only my son, we had the front room downstairs. There had been painted calcimine in the staircase and every time there was a gust of wind or a door slammed it was like a bride walked up there with confetti. Gee, what a job we had doing that place up. In the middle room there was wallpaper hanging like curtains, it had all come away from the walls. We loved that house up there and we walked out into the yard and we had the laundry and we had the toilet out there but the beauty was the bath upstairs, that wasn't out in the yard.

That was progress then.

21:15 It was for us at that time and we loved that house, we had a lot of good memories up there, twenty-nine years of them.

Did your parents and you do much to that house to improve it?

21:25 Teddy did, he done the painting. We got into a lot of debt to have carpet and a lounge and everything. There was always something there to be done, doing round the windows, painting the walls. We decided we'd do a feature wall in the dining room and Teddy is up the ladder and I'm down the ladder, catching the roll and marking it off and in

and out the water and putting it up, loved doing that. We had great times there.

Wasn't it the landlord's job to fix the house?

Well they always said they only had a certain amount of money and we lived there and we done it to the best that we could keep it that way.

The head tenant, what was her name again?

Mrs Spragg.

Who actually owned the house - was it the Maritime Services Board?

22:17 It would have been Maritime Services, that is in Lower Fort Street. We were Maritime still until Sydney Cove Development Authority came in, they are now SCRA.

Then the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority owned the house, what was the effect of them coming in?

22:36 Well the minute they came in they said we were all paying too little rent for what we had, the rents went up two hundred and fifty per cent. Nita McRae done wonderful work in keeping us people up there, otherwise who knows where we would have been. Good people moved out of the area - they said that they were earning too much money. There was mention of some person that had quite an amount of money from all accounts and they shouldn't be here, sort of thing. Whether they moved voluntary I'm not real sure on that part.

Did you pay the increased rent?

Oh yes.

Do you remember how much the rent was before and after it went up?

23:26 Oh yes. It was two pound one shilling because we were on the corner, where the Shangrila is, we were on the end of that there and there was a walkway that took you down into Gloucester Street and we had a lane behind that too and we paid ten shillings more for living on that corner. There were four other houses there: Mr McCarthy, Mrs O'Brien, Tracy's, that was a verandah up and downstairs terrace house. There were two houses down from that, Edna Mybole lived in one and it used to be Watkins the coal yard had the other side, his yard for his truck and his coal and whatever he did there with it.

Were you allowed to keep any pets in the place in Cumberland Street?

24:37 Oh yes, there were never any problems.

What sort of animals did you have?

24:43 We had a cat and a dog and a cockatoo. It was my mother's bird, we finished up

taking that off her, it got a bit too hard for her. She lived down the back of us then in Gloucester Street because with Sydney Cove they moved various people up into the upper part of The Rocks area. So she was behind me in Gloucester Street and we took the cocky because it got to much for her to do and one of her dogs, she had two, the brothers got them. My brothers died when they were forty-nine, two years apart, the middle boy and then the youngest boy, so we had a bit of sadness with that too. Mum was about ten years in Gloucester Street and she went over into the Housing Commission units because they built those units up there in Cumberland Street for the people that would be displaced with what they were hoping to do with the area. She loved it up there, the bathroom was inside and the toilet was inside and she had no stairs.

25:58 Then we were robbed up there and it was very upsetting, so Teddy said he wanted to leave and be offered something else, so we ended up in Lower Fort Street where those tenement houses are and it was awful there. Poor old dog couldn't walk up and down the stairs because he was getting old then and I hated it, really hated it. I've got to be able to walk out, I can't be confined to an area, which we were there. Then we were lucky enough to get this place here.

You are talking about your married life, where you moved and so on. What about your mother?

My mother was in Cumberland Street. She was in The Rocks, living in Gloucester Street and then went into Cumberland Street, into the new units up there, Sirius.

You know of course about the Green Bans, tell me about your involvement in that.

27:04 Well I never got arrested, my husband did and a lot of people did. The man that lived next door to me in Cumberland Street used to play the organ down at the church, he got arrested under the *Trespassing Act* when they all went into the garage that was Playfair's in Argyle Cut. They locked themselves in there and the police came along and wanted them to come out, and whatever, and they got arrested and it was under the *Trespassing Act* they were charged. A lot of good people gave up their time and whatever to go into that and be arrested.

Now for those people who listen to this tape and don't know the background to that, can you give me the background of why they were arrested and what happened?

28:00 It was under the *Trespassing Act* - they wanted them to leave the garage. Just next door to the Orient Hotel, that was Playfair's. Where the clock tower is now is where Playfair's the meat works were. We were fighting to stay here, we didn't want to go, I don't know where they wanted us to go, they wanted to demolish quite a bit of the area. As luck

turned out we have retained a lot of it, thanks to the efforts of Nita McRae and the Builders' Labourers' and all the support we got from various organisations.

When you say 'they' do you mean Sydney Cove Redevelopment?

28:46 They were the ones that didn't want all this consultation, they wanted to develop this area and that area and demolish this and demolish that and we said we needed to keep it. We had Jack Munday on our side.

The people that were trying to demolish the area they were developers were they.

That was Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority.

This was in the early 1970s, wasn't it?

Yes, early 1970s.

Did you get a notice that you had to leave your place, what happened?

29:20 We never had that. What happened - we decided that when we were robbed and we were sitting there more or less on the corner anything could happen, and that was very traumatic, that you go out and you come home and people have been in your house and robbed you - several times I had been robbed there. This was in 158 Cumberland Street so my husband and I decided that we would get out of there, that we were eventually having to have to go, and we moved down here on the corner of Trinity Avenue and that was awful, wasn't at all happy there.

30:10 END OF TAPE MP-FH10 SIDE A

30:12 START OF TAPE MP-FH10 SIDE B

Now the robbery, did the police ever charge anyone or find anyone?

30:21 No because we knew who done it. My niece was involved with this chappie this particular time and we didn't want to put her into the police, should have I suppose, I don't know but we didn't. Took the television and all sorts of things, which was a big thing for us to have taken.

So it made you feel a bit insecure living there, did it?

Very much so and we had to go eventually, it was all up for demolition. We have now got the big Shangrila Hotel up there.

You didn't get arrested but your husband did, tell me about that.

31:12 Oh just that they were all in there in this old garage at Playfairs and I was a spectator outside, not inside. The police came in and just took them out, they all went peacefully. There was a bit of pushing and shoving and what not. They just got arrested and spent so many hours in gaol.

When you lived in Cumberland Street, was that a boarding house too?

They were terrace houses, lovely houses.

There was no landlady?

No.

Did you have the house to yourself or did you share it with someone?

31:51 I had it to myself, a beautiful big place. As I said, three bedrooms up, three rooms down, nice little backyard, verandah out in the front. Bit noisy at times with the cars that went down on the Cahill Expressway, but apart from that we loved it there.

How long were you there actually?

Twenty-nine years.

You must have left when they built the Shangrila Hotel?

32:22 Before then, probably in the 1980s - we've been here nearly twenty years, 1984, 1985.

Was the Department of Housing in then?

They were in.

What were they like compared to the previous regime?

32:39 Well they brought the standards of the houses up fantastically well. They carpeted this place, Teddy paints this place here. When we moved in here it had all been renovated, the bathroom, the laundry, the little sun area downstairs, the kitchen, nice ceramic tiles on the kitchen floor and the bathroom, everything was perfect. Hot water and all, which we supplied ourselves when we lived in Cumberland Street.

Now this is 48 Argyle Place where we are and you have been here since about 1984. How have the Department of Housing been as landlords?

I don't have any problems.

How has Millers Point changed in all that time that you have been living here?

33:38 Big changes, big changes. There is not too many of the original people here, I don't know the other people that come in. I think the fabric has changed. This was a working-

class area with families that went to school, we are still lucky to have our school up here on Observatory Hill. I don't want to say too much about that, I don't want to say about this one here and that one there, I just don't bother, they don't cause me any problems. 34:29 Our way of life has changed, definitely. For instance, if my son and daughter wanted to come back round here to live they wouldn't be able to. Not they want to, they've got their homes, one is at Gosford and one is at Blacktown. There is various people that would like to come back to the area and I think we should bring in people, there should be working-class people brought into the area. We have got to have three classes of people: you have got to have the people that have the money, like down here in Pottinger Street; you've got to have people who are working and can pay the rents; and then you have people who are pensioners that need cheaper housing. Not just all government-supported families, that might sound a bit awful but that is my thoughts on it.

Well there are those three classes of people anyway, aren't there?

35:33 Well we are getting that way now, yes. The two houses that are getting done up down the street, we don't know who is going into them, whether it is families or crisis housing, down the corner here, about 62, 64.

In your day you mean to say it was all working-class families and it has changed to this now?

Well more or less. A lot of people moved out.

Did they move out because they couldn't afford to pay the rents any more?

No, I wouldn't say that, no I don't think that was the reason, but it could very well be now I suppose, with the value of the land.

Do you have any idea what the houses might be worth if you could buy them on the open market?

36:26 Oh yes. This place here, I'm not real sure on the figure of that but I know this house alone, counting the one next door, it was worth over a million x amount of years ago and you could say four or five million, might even be more, if it was converted back to the one house and with the area we have got down the back, our yard.

You are talking about the house next door as well.

Yes, it is one house this.

Beverley Sutton lives next door and it used to be one house.

36:58 Yes. Then probably in the late 1920s or whenever they converted it to two. Well, her place is bigger inside than what mine is but I've got the side passage here, the driveway, I suppose.

It is a four storey house and it is in one of the best areas of Sydney, really.

The best, the best part of Millers Point too. I mean we have got that lovely area out there, the Village Green, Observatory Hill. I love to stand out there just looking because we are very privileged.

Do you feel secure now living here?

Oh yes. If you are downstairs you lock upstairs and if you are upstairs you lock downstairs, but you do that anywhere.

Do you feel secure as far as being a tenant is concerned, here for the future?

Yes.

You don't think anyone is going to push you out of here?

No.

Most other people seem to feel a sense of insecurity, they think maybe the rents will go too high and they won't be able to afford them and all that sort of thing.

38:17 Well we are pensioners so we can't complain. I mean this place is over four hundred dollars a week if we had to pay, I suppose that is a lot, yes it would be. No, I don't feel like that at all and I feel that if for some other reason they wanted this property we would be offered something else. I am not worried about what is happening three, five, ten, fifteen years down the track, Teddy and I are over sixty so we can't be worried about that.

Now let's go back to when you were much younger, back to the 1940s or 1950s now, you were born in 1933.

I worked at Bushell's when I left school. A lot of the girls from here worked at Bushell's or Boxham and Chambers.

What were conditions of work like at Bushell's?

39:19 Good, we were happy there. We done our work, we had all the things that we needed. We had our lunch room and we could buy tea and coffee and whatever we wanted to buy. The people we worked with were mostly people we knew from Millers Point.

What was your job at Bushell's?

I was wrapping and packing teas, big twelve pound packets of teas.

Do you still drink Bushell's?

39:50 Well it is a toss-up. I have got different teas that I drink, Bushell's, Dilmah, English Breakfast.

When you were living in Millers Point when you were younger, say the 1950s when you were in your twenties, were there any ethnic people living here? Were there Chinese or where there

Italians?

40:14 We had a Chinese and we grew up with that family, down next to the Orient Hotel, the Cummings. Lionel was one of the boys and how I remember him is that he was friendly with my brother, I can't think of the other boy. They were good family people. Then we had the James's next door to the Observer, that was their laundry business there, they were Chinese and no problems there.

Were there Italians or Greeks?

40:49 I worked in a little Italian shop down in George Street before I went to Bushell's, de Losas, they'd been in the area for yonks, they were good church people. The paper shop in George Street, Mrs Channel had that and her son Brian and her sister Meg, they run the paper shop there. Them days it was open of a Saturday afternoon to get the paper. They were good people. We had the butcher's shop, Grubbs, Doughnton and Dyers, Ship Providores. We lost them, in probably the early 1970s, they moved out. We had a fish shop there. You could walk around here any time in those days and didn't feel threatened, well I never did. I don't know so much about now either but I'd be a bit dubious of a Saturday night with the people that come in that mightn't mean to do you any harm but their behaviour and their attitude to people.

Was there always an element of crime in the area?

No I don't think so.

I have heard of a couple of murders being committed in Millers Point.

42:07 Oh yes there was, that was the 'shark arm', that was in the 1930s I think, I remember my mother telling me about that. That happened at the steps going down to Hickson Road. There was one up in front of the Australian Hotel, I can't even think of the name that was in that now. That is two murders.

The 'shark arm' mystery - that was when the head of the man was found inside the shark wasn't it?

His arm.

That was in 1937.

It had a tattoo on it and that is how they found out who he was.

It was a dangerous place if there were murders.

42:55 I think it was in the 1920s. Probably the Depression years I suppose they had a lot of problems then but I don't know about that.

Did your parents tell me about how they survived during the Depression years?

43:15 It was very hard, very hard. My father used to apparently go down and meet some of the ships that would have come in and might have got things off the seamen that he knew. My mother always had a pension and that wasn't terribly much but she said that paid the rent for the room that they had down there, the little flat. So times were hard. You could go to the butcher's shop and she said you'd get six penneth of breakfast meat, you'd get a sausage and perhaps a pork chop and something else. I wouldn't like to live in them days, it would be terrible.

Was there any divide between the religions at Millers Point?

I don't think so. There were the Catholics and the Protestants - the kids that went to the Catholic School and the kids that went to Fort Street, not as far as I know anyhow.

Were the people at Dawes Point regarded the same as Millers Point?

44:19 Yes, though actually, us in The Rocks area, the divide of the Bridge there, we sort of stayed with ourselves over there. We weren't allowed as children to walk up the Cut, it was a bit dangerous they thought, so we sort of stayed there at the playground. Some of the kids from Millers Point would come over to the playground or they'd stay on this side and play.

What about when you were a teenage girl, eighteen or something, before you married - what sort of socialising was there? Did you go dancing and that sort of stuff?

45:01 No, I never really bothered with anybody up here, we'd have our own friends and we'd go on that side to the pictures, or to the wrestling in those days, or to a dance down at the Trocadero.

What was it like at the Trocadero?

45:17 It was fun in those days, it was nice down there. It is a pity we don't have that sort of thing now for the kids but it might be a bit old-fashioned for them. It was a nice place to go and meet.

What about a balls, did you go to balls as well?

No.

So you have only changed a few times addresses at Millers Point. You started off at 33 Lower Fort and then 57 Lower Fort.

Then 50 Harrington Street and then 158 in Cumberland Street and 42 Trinity Avenue, and then here. That was terrible down there.

Tell me about Trinity Avenue.

46:18 It was all right there, knew some of the old identities. I was working in those days

so you were to and from and didn't socialise too much with them.

The house was okay at Trinity Avenue, was it?

It was okay but it was not what I wanted. Lot of stairs there and couldn't walk out into the yard, like in Cumberland Street or here.

Do you think you are a different person for having lived at Millers Point?

No, I don't think it would have mattered where we lived. Although I do love Millers Point, no, I don't think so.

Do you think you are a more caring person perhaps because of living in Millers Point?

47:13 No, I don't think so. I do care for the area, I care for the people that I have grown up with, that we had such good times with.

Flo, looking back at your life - what have been the major events in your life that have happened to you?

47:31 Well getting married, losing my father, my brothers. My children, which I am very happy with, they have turned out to be good citizens. I lost me two brothers. I am still living here in The Rocks-Millers Point area. Teddy and I are reasonably well in our health, Teddy is not the best with his diabetes. No, I'm quite happy with everything.

Which event in your life do you think would have given you the most personal satisfaction?

48:12 Probably the fact of my two children and their children. Wonderful, five grandkids, very happy with them all, all grown up to be good kids. The youngest one is twelve and he is a real sweetie.

What is your view now of this suburb, Millers Point, how do you see it?

48:37 Well it has changed. I don't know if it is for the better or not. I'm quite happy with Millers Point the way it is.

Do you think it is due for any great changes in the immediate future?

I don't think so, I don't know what else they could do.

Are you happy with the way that the Department of Housing is looking after these properties?

49:08 Yes, I've got no complaints about that. They have certainly upgraded a lot of the properties. I mean when you think about the bathrooms and the toilets outside and the tin baths and the old fuel coppers and all that, that has all gone. I believe the older people, they supply them with washing machines, well all of that is mine. No they come and fix everything, they may not be as quick but it doesn't drag on indefinitely either, well I haven't had that problem.

Some of the other tenants are complaining it is taking too long to come and fix the plumbing and that sort of stuff.

49:47 Well they are very prompt now with this drought. You could ring up today and say your taps are leaking and there'd be someone here tomorrow morning. This place hasn't been painted by them since we moved in, which is twenty years, my husband does all this now and his eyesight isn't the best, you can see the flaws in his painting. They renewed this carpet here, they wouldn't do the area outside that door there but I'm glad they done this. No, I don't have any complaints about them.

We are just coming to the end of our interview - is there anything else you want to talk about?

I can't think of anything now, probably when you go I will think I should have said this, should have said that. No I can't think of anything more.

Well thanks very much for the interview.

50:47 END OF INTERVIEW WITH FLO SECKOLD & END OF TAPE MP-FH10 SIDE B