



CITY OF SYDNEY

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

INTERVIEWEE: Harry Gatt

INTERVIEWER: Richard Raxworthy

DATE: 23/01/01

PLACE: ?

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **RR:** This is Commercial Oral Histories of Central Sydney. The date is the 23rd of January, 2001 and I'm talking to Harry Gatt who was a – he claims – the longest serving customer of Andy Ellis.

HG: The longest standing customer.

RR: Longest standing customer. Yes, right. So, can I ask you first to spell your full name?

HG: My family name is Gatt, G-A-T-T.

RR: And do you have first names?

HG: My first name is Henry *****

RR: Right. Well, those are standard - - -

HG: Known as Harry.

RR: And what year were you born?

HG: 1935.

RE: Where?

HG: In South Hurstville.

RR: Did you grow up around there?

HG: Yes, I grew up around South Hurstville and there was lots of - - -

RR: Went to school?

HG: Went to school at South Carlton Primary and then to Kogarah High School with a couple of known identities; Ken Rosewall and Bruce Crampton were in my class at school, so, we're all getting on now.

RR: And when did you first come across Andy Ellis' shop?

1.13 HG: My father had a garage, a service station, in the late forties and fifties in Oxford Street in Paddington and Andy Ellis worked in a place called Adelstein's Menswear and Andy had a room upstairs where he made clothes – and this was before he became well-known and had his own shop - and my father took me there in January, 1951, sixty years ago to this moment – and bought me a suit for my birthday, for my sixteenth birthday.

RR: Was that off the peg in those days?

HG: Oh, no, no, that was tailor made. It was junior navy, double breasted with boxy shoulders and peg bottoms as the – similar to the suits they're making today, with the baggy knees and it was all the bodgie Gatt days.

RR: And it was a bodgie suit when you were a young fellow?

HG: Sixteen, teenager – well, that was the fashion.

RR: And your father didn't object to that style of suit?

HG: Well, no. Andy asked me what I wanted. My father didn't ask me what I wanted. The tailor said – looked at me and said, "At sixteen year old this is what you need", because back in those days places like Andy Ellis and Ron Bennett's of Newtown were the only places where you could buy anything fashionable because the David Jones and Farmer's – as it was then and now Grace Brothers - were all very, very conservative and Lowe's and Gowing's, so you needed – they were very rare to find a place, so this is why Andy became popular a bit later on.

2.23 **RR: And you went there again later on when he moved?**

HG: Oh, yes - and then he moved into Pitt Street – but in the meantime I joined the Surf Club within a year or so and when we passed our Bronze, Surf Bronze examination, we went and got our blazers made there. I went back there and got him to make blazers and some of the mates in the Surf Club, I told them about it, so they all went down as well. But by this time Andy had gone down to Pitt Street and he was starting to become a little bit well known and then, as we were saying before, Johnny O’Keefe’s father had a menswear shop nearby and then Johnny went there. But I actually worked for Lee Gordon [music promoter] in the late fifties with Johnny O’Keefe and the Delltones, and then Lee – I was Lee’s salesman for his record company, the only salesman he ever had because the record company only lasted a year and then it went kerfunk for various reasons. But Festival Records wanted Johnny O’Keefe because they lost him early and they wanted him back, so they bought the lead-on label and took me over as a salesman to go with it, with the general Festival catalogue, and it was there where I had a lot of communication with Johnny - had an office within our office. And of course Col Joye and Kevin Jacobsen and Lucky Starr lived near me at Kingsgrove and he [Starr] would often visit the studio and I’d give him a lift home from work when he was still an electrician and was wondering whether he should give up the music or whether he should be an electrician, because he was having no luck, until that record came out of “I’ve been Everywhere” and of course we all know he hasn’t looked back since.

And he was really considering giving it up. He’s saying, “This is too bloody tough. I can’t hack it”.

RR: What was Col Joye’s proper name?

HG: Jacobsen, Kevin Jacobsen’s Col Joye’s brother. There was Col Jacobsen but they changed their name to showbiz - but Kevin Jacobsen’s his brother and a now entrepreneur and Keith Jacobsen, Kevin was the piano player, Keith was the bass player and Col, of course, was the lead guitar and singer.

RR: And where are they now?

HG: Well, Kevin’s just up the road here from my place; about five hundred metres up here at Hunters Hill.

RR: I was given a phone number there and it just turned out to be a fax.

HG: Oh, well, I’ve got the phone number because I see Kevin occasionally and further down on the Woolwich, on the peninsula, Col lives. But they grew up at Revesby.

RR: And who else. Digger Revell, do you remember him?

HG: Digger Revell, yes. Yes, Digger Revell, I think was with RCA, not with us, but we had Noelene Battley, and we had the Bee Gees used to come into the office when I think the twins were about twelve and Robin would have been about - would have been about fourteen and they were just kids and, yes, making their first records and that was quite interesting, to see how they exploded in years to come.

5.07 **RR: Ross Ellis gave me a little piece of material which was supposed to be from a gold coat that Col Joye wore in 1989. Do you remember that?**

HG: Well, there was a history of rock thing on recently, where I think it's maybe about fifteen years ago, it might be, where Col went back and got a suit made but 1989 – yes, yes, that's only about eleven to twelve years ago because I actually spoke with Col's wife, Dallas, and she said that they still had all his measurements and things and all he put on was a slight amount in the waist and he hadn't really changed. So, they just made – they just pulled out the old patterns and cut his suit for him. She said they were quite amazed because he hadn't been there for quite a few years in between. But he's still got all the records from way back from my first – he's got these books and they go back through the records of what I've had made over the years.

RR: Yes, I've looked at them. They're amazing.

HG: Yes.

RR: You can hardly read them but nonetheless they're amazing.

HG: Yes, they are. They're all carbon copies, yes.

RR: Absolutely incredible. Now, do you remember the competitions like the Beau Brummel Competition and the Guys 'n' Dolls Competition?

6.25 HG: Yes, I sort of remember those things. They were many, many years ago but while we liked our good clothes and everything we weren't that much into to become a Beau Brummel.

RR: Do you remember any of the window dressing, special window dressing they had?

HG: Oh, yes. He had some quite unique windows and quite often many photos of the speedboats, many photos of the boats and things, yes.

RR: Now, what about the time they had a poker machine in the window?

HG: Look, over the years they had, you know, many things but I don't

RR: You don't remember that. Well, they had a whole lot of money pouring out of the poker machine and somebody did a smash and grab on the window.

HG: Yes. Oh, God. Yes, I mean I used to go there regularly but obviously you don't buy clothes every month. You know, I might have been there twice a year or three times a year over the years when it suited.

RR: So, how do you think that the clientele – do you still go there?

HG: Yes, I'm still a customer there today. It's only late last year, in the year 2000 I bought myself a pair of trousers because I like what they make and their prices are quite good, actually, considering that they're handmade to suit you personally. But also I'm slightly an odd shape, short in the legs, so it's just as well to go there and buy them as to buy them somewhere else and pay to have them all altered.

RR: What about accessories? Do you ever get anything like that there?

7.32 HG: I'd get the occasional belt or tie but, you know, they're not that fashionable in that area these days and maybe an occasional shirt but not a lot.

RR: Did you ever go up to their workroom, upstairs, when they had it upstairs?

HG: No, I didn't go into the workroom, no.

RR: And you remember Rodney Jacobs, do you?

HG: I remember Rodney well, yes. He was always – got ready for the races every week; he certainly liked his punting - but I don't know how he's going these days. I believe you spoke with him this morning?

RR: Yes, I did, yes, and he's not far from Randwick Racecourse, so - he didn't mention - - -

HG: Yes. Oh, well, that'd suit him in his retirement. Oh, no, I think he got disillusioned with it and gave it away.

RR: I think that he's got a full time job there as Secretary of the Body Corporate.

HG: Uh-huh.

RR: I think he had about six phone calls while I was there.

8.21 HG: Oh, yes. Well, Rodney was always – had the vest on as part of the three piece suit, the piece suit – he certainly looked like a racegoer, even in the shop.

RR: Did you know anything about his theatrical career?

HG: Rodney's? No, I didn't, actually, I don't.

RR: He was around when the Dad 'n' Dave period and what have you, although he was only a young fellow, you know.

HG: Yes. Back on the - - -

RR: He got put in a number of things.

HG: - - - the radio serial days?

RR: Yes. And, yes, he also mentioned – did you see anybody from come around there?

HG: Um, there were always people wandering in and out and oddbods and things like that and you knew that they were somebody but didn't always know personally who they were.

RR: He said that Roy Rene [vaudeville performer known as 'Mo'] used to come in but never buy anything.

HG: Well, I don't -

RR: He used to put on a little bit of a show for them.

HG: Yes.

RR: What about other staff? Were there many staff there when you first went there?

HG: Well, originally there was only Andy down in Paddington but staff came and go but they – you know, they did have the odd tailor there that measured you up at different times. It's sort of – you know, we're going back a lot of years now, so I can't always remember the names but I certainly remember Rodney quite clearly as well.

RR: Do you remember how many fittings they used to give you?

9.32 HG: They would measure you up and then give you a fitting and then you would go in and they'd tear it all off - and I used to think, "God, what's going on?" because it would be all the hessian from the lining inside out - and they'd rip it and then back and then they'd give you a second fitting and then next time it would be ready and usually about a three week turnaround, which was quite good for a suit.

RR: Well, at that time – I mean now he hasn't got a workroom upstairs so anything made to measure is made outside.

HG: Yes, but I think they've always had rooms somewhere, a factory or something somewhere because they did a lot of other production.

RR: And do you ever remember them having any special packaging when you took anything out of there?

HG: No, I can't exactly recall anything particular.

RR: He doesn't remember anything.

HG: No.

RR: Any special bags or boxes?

HG: No. He probably had Andy Ellis bags and things but, you know, it's quite a while and these days they put them on a hanger in a plastic bag for you. You know, you buy a coat and they put one of those nice covers, zip front covers over, so.

RR: So, what were the stages of the business as you remember it? I mean, the early ones when they were doing the bodgie suits, yes.

10.38 HG: Well, the early ones – well, he was obviously just starting out when I went there or, you know, he was certainly working out of another shop. And then, as I said earlier, that Johnny O'Keefe went there, which would have probably been in the late fifties and bought an outfit - and Johnny was outrageous, 'cause I knew Johnny, having worked with him - and people saw what he was wearing. So, the Col Joyes and all of the artists in that era were going along and, I mean, there were a lot of guys just loved to go to dances and they'd have trousers with, in the old measurements, twelve inch cuffs, which were very tight – and purple. Some of the cuffs on the trousers were so tight, like, peg bottoms that they had to put a zipper in them to get their foot through and then they'd zipper them down and of course they were too tight around the ankles - and very big, baggy knees and pleats everywhere and, you know, and odd colours; as I said, purple and things like that, so. But probably those late fifties and through the sixties were the heyday.

RR: What about the flares?

HG: Well, the flares were later on. They were in the sixties, of course; the fashions changed – but they were the big days of when you'd go in there: the shop would be very busy and a lot of people and you'd see all sorts of sort of familiar faces, either from tele or somewhere, you know, from - - -

11.51 **RR: Did you get flares?**

HG: Oh, yes. We all had to wear flares, yes – but they weren't outrageous flares; they were conservative but they were flares, yes. They would have been late sixties and early seventies that the flares came in. And you see the odd person still wearing them today. I was "Not again, still".

RR: They're trying to get them back.

HG: Yes, yes. Well, they've got to keep changing fashions to keep the turnover, haven't they?

RR: Yes, that's right, yes. Now, it looks as if I've run out of questions. Can you think of anything?

HG: No, just that, you know, as we discussed before, later on things did quieten down and then Andy was telling me himself one day that some chap came in from the country area and asked could he make a coat for his daughter, which was a riding jacket for the equestrian. And he said, "Oh, I've never made ladies clothes but I'll give it a go", and he did and they liked it so much that all the friends came in and before long all of the equestrian clubs around the state and the country were all ordering off him and then his business sort of blossomed again but in a different way and yes. So, in fact, a friend of mine, Col Joye's wife, only said to me recently that she bought a jacket somewhere in the country for riding and it had an Andy Ellis label and she couldn't believe it. She didn't realise 'cause they'd lost touch with him then, until 1989 when he went back for the rock historian.

13.15 **RR: Yes, they're still selling?**

HG: Yes, oh, yes, they're still selling, doing quite well.

RR: And did you have any repairs and remakes done there over the period?

HG: Yes, I did at one stage - they were always very good like that. At one stage the lapels were very, very wide and really big collars on jackets and things and they went out and I had a couple of jackets which the material and the fit were still quite good, so they took them back, so

they pulled them apart and reduced the size of the lapels and, yes, and reshaped them so to speak, which was quite good of them. So, that gave me another couple of years out of it but they were good, good jackets that I liked. I didn't particularly want to order a brand new one again, so, yes. So, they were good like that and they're always good for alterations and things.

RR: Do you buy your shirts there as well?

HG: Not generally, no, no. They never really got that much into that side of the fashion. They - - - but, yes, mainly shirts were bought at other places.

RR: Well, I've copied a photograph of you – what year was that taken, that photograph I've got here?

14.16 HG: That photograph would have been taken in – and that's in an Andy Ellis suit and that would have been taken in – that's a brown suit that I had with the button-down collar and the shirt, so I can relate to that. So, that would have been about 1970-ish. About that time I had a friend working for an agency, casting agency, and just for a joke I went along and I got quite a few TV ads out of it. So, that photo was taken by the studio: they needed some photos for their files, so I went and had those taken and that was then.

RR: All right. Well, I haven't got any more questions – unless you can think of something else?

HG: No, it's just that I still do go there and buy my clothes, as I've said, for the reasons I said earlier. So, I guess that's I'm their – definitely the longest standing customer. Maybe not their oldest in years but at sixty six I'm certainly been going there for fifty years so, yes, there wouldn't be too many people much older than me, I s'pose, buying fashion clothes.

RR: Right. Well, thank you very much, Mr Harry Gatt.

15.18 HG: Thank you.

Interview ends