



ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

INTERVIEWEE: Max Raine

INTERVIEWER: Margo Beasley

PLACE: The Rocks

DATE: 27 March 2012

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **MB:** This is an interview with Mr Max Raine. It's taking place in his offices in Harrington Street in The Rocks in Sydney. It's the 27th of March 2012. It's the City of Sydney's Oral History Programme and I'm Margo Beasley.

And Max has just shown me a magazine, a real estate magazine which has a timeline of Raine & Horne in it in which it announces that Max Raine became chairman in 1969 but in fact it was 1973. So I suppose you'd actually done all the hard yards by then, had you?

MR: Well, I came from school into Raine & Horne and was the office boy and I really wish I had have kept a diary of all the funny things that went on.

MB: Such as?

MR: Rent collecting, particularly rent collecting. Peter Radko - he's never been heard of since - he'd go from door to door (knocks) and collect the rent. What interests me as I look back and we had a massive lot of terraces from the Cooper Estate, the Macarthur Estate, the various big estates and you'd go to the door of one of them and he'd have the rent for the rest of the half dozen. Just how honest people were: no thought of going around with all this money in your pocket, no thought of a revolver in your pocket or anything. You'd already written out the receipts of all these damn people you were calling on before you even called on them: that's how sure you were the rent'd be paid.

MB: And so you were acting as agent on behalf of the owners?

MR: Yes, property managers. And door to door rent collecting, which they wouldn't know how to spell it today, of course.

2.00 **MB: And we're talking now about the immediate post-war period?**

MR: Yes, yes.

MB: Because I understand you've just had a big birthday as well. Is that right?

MR: Yes, I'm eighty on the 3rd of November, on the day that White Nose won the Melbourne Cup. And why is that famous? It's because it's the only time that Phar Lap was beaten.

MB: Is that right?

MR: That was to welcome me on the earth.

MB: So we're here today to talk basically about real estate in the City of Sydney's boundaries which as you will be well aware are quite large now and I'm interested in your early days as a real estate agent around Sydney and I understand you did work a lot around the inner city area.

MR: Very much so.

MB: So what can you tell me about that?

MR: Well, in trying to prepare my mind for your cross-examination, the interesting was that in those days terrace houses were out. And I'll get to Paddington for example, I'll give you lists of streets there that I dealt with. No one wanted to live in Paddington - they were all the sort of workers and the pretty low brand of workers in those areas - and to see the swing from that living and the types of people living in it to what is there today and you're dealing with many of them worth a

million dollars and much more. And those were the days after the war that the councils such as yours [City of Sydney] were giving all sorts of orders of compliance to their owners. So I'm thinking of particular estate that's got any numbers of orders for sewerage, for water, for drainage, for roofing and, of course, the owner said "Well, we're not going to spend any of this money. Go and sell the terrace houses to the people".

4.03 **MB: To the tenants?**

MR: To the tenants, to the tenants who'd been there some donkey's years and a lot of them, wharf labourers, awfully nice lot of people; I remember a lot of them very well. And your instructions from the owners were "Just get it off our books. If they will pay that price, great, but if they can't pay it and when you've exhausted them on the money side of things, say to them 'Right, here's fifty pounds to you, Margo. Now, you give it back to me and I'll give you a receipt of a deposit'" and that started the sale. They couldn't believe it and of course they were very different days, you wouldn't believe it. But I'm thinking of one or two of them are my great friends – or their children are, rather – and I'm thinking of one that would be worth about a million and a half today and in those days it was a protected tenancy and they were paid to get out, apart from paid for them doing the repairs. So that's the big change from the traditional house to terrace housing and after that, of course, to apartments. And apartments you've now seen – bringing you up to the present day – apartment living is a step to home living, more or less.

MB: What do you mean by that, sorry?

MR: Well, people get into an apartment first – home unit, if you like – and get their breath, their financial breath together and then when babies come along possibly and things they get into a house with a backyard.

MB: So I understand that about seventy five per cent of residents in the City of Sydney's boundaries live in apartments of one kind or another.

MR: As high as that?

MB: And apparently it is very high.

MR: I wouldn't have thought so but then I'm not too sure where your boundaries go today. That takes Green Square in, doesn't it?

6.03 **MB: Yes. And I wondered if you'd actually observed any changes like that? Like there is a kind of perception that sometimes it's a staging post until you go into a house with a backyard - - -**

MR: Oh, definitely.

MB: - - - but I wondered if that might be changing now.

MR: Well, I think the planning of home units has gone ahead greatly. There's more accent on aspect, sun, there's more on outdoor living and you've seen this in Victoria Park where I pass often and there's far greater emphasis on the new buildings on outdoor living, barbeque space and these things. Maybe, as a criticism, there's not too much space for parkland anywhere and I think that does bring the – well, that's away from what you were talking about now.

MB: No, not really, because that's part of the amenity of living somewhere, isn't it?

MR: Well, I suppose I was most impressed when I went to Paris a few times at their long, narrow parks in between their five and ten storey buildings, built for children, little children, people my age, right the way down an avenue beautifully landscaped and I think the council, your council, has done quite a lot in this regard, buying back little corner strips and things like that and starting a little park here or park there and there could be much more of that.

MB: When you say there's an emphasis now in apartments on outdoor living, the new apartments that are being built, what was it like in the '50s and '60s then?

MR: Well if they had a verandah at all it wouldn't be what you would say is a useful verandah and they didn't even have what I call those French windows that are so good when they have the window coming right down the balcony.

8.04 So those sort of units of the 1950s, '60s are discounted on the market because they don't get that outdoor air and the sun and whatever. So the new ones, I think, have come leaps and bounds ahead of what they were only ten years ago.

MB: What do you think's prompted those changes?

MR: Well, I think firstly price: they were a lower price than the equivalent. I mean, let's say Zetland which is Clover Moore's backyard at the moment, Zetland has terrace houses that – take 1 Portman Street where we've sold several – a million dollars-plus and they're just the

terrace houses that you can visualise anywhere, nothing special about them. If they have car entrances at the back or at the front for that matter to put the car in then, of course, they're worth a lot more but in Portman Street a million dollars for a terrace is to my mind quite a lot of money. And that equivalent house would be worth probably a million and a half or more in the more socially desirable – I'm trying to think of a nice word – areas such as Woollahra, Paddington and Surry Hills has now come right up the social ladder.

MB: So what was Surry Hills like when you were a young chap around the traps?

MR: Well, we were selling houses in strips some of the time, who want five or six – I'm thinking of the owner; he's very ill at the moment; I must get in touch with him again – but Baptist Street was one of them, you know, all those streets running off and we managed a street or two there until the owners decided to get out and the same thing again.

10.01 The owner – this is the difference; it doesn't happen today – the owner would offer finance and I can't imagine why more owners don't do that on the basis of many of them don't want the money, they want an interest on their money, and you couldn't have anything more secure than the house that they knew and they were selling and it's not done. We often in those days would offer one third down, two thirds for five years at an ordinary bank rate of interest to get rid of the property. But later they went away from that. You never see today, never, ever, an owner saying "Seventy five per cent or fifty per cent on mortgage". I think that's the big change and I can't see why not just residentially but also commercially when the person selling doesn't have any need of the money, wants security like a bank deposit and you've got to have everything secure on the property you've owned for years, be it commercial or residential.

MB: So what happens is then that the owner actually lends the money - - -

MR: Yes, the owner, yes.

MB: - - - to the purchaser and the purchaser repays the owner at an agreed level of interest?

MR: Repays, yes. And, mark you, if they are bold they'll take a lower interest rate than say they'd get on term deposit at a bank to push up their capital value. Well, that used to be the case before capital gains tax came in and they may not be so keen on doing that today. But in the early days when I was selling commercial – leaping ahead to

commercial real estate – you'd always say to your owner in so many kind words, "If you don't want the money, so I suggest you do it this way and you'll get a higher return", you should, you should.

MB: So when you said you sold whole strips of houses, like in Baptist Street, who would own those houses?

12.00 MR: Estates. The Cooper Estate, we started really on the back of certain big estates, the Wentworth Estates and the Cooper Estates. The Woollahra Council has some excellent history of the Cooper Estate so I ought to be able to find some for you. They just owned suburbs after suburbs which - you know suburbs, the Cooper Park, you know the one?

MB: Yes, in the eastern suburbs, yes.

MR: And they generously gave Cooper Park to the council. Gee, and I'd love to own it today, acres and acres of it, because there's no way they could have subdivided it in those days.

MB: It's very steep, isn't it, Cooper Park?

MR: Yes, very beautiful and there's a Raine Street leading into it. But the Cooper Estates, if someone doesn't write the history of it – in our book - I can't even give you one; we've just about run out. Can I get it?

MB: We've just had a short pause and Max has retrieved the company history which is called 'Private Property'.

MR: That's where we were in the old days. Never write a book.

MB: O.K.

MR: It took a million hours. Wait a minute – Cooper. Though there are pages and pages of them. The house of the Cooper – Cooper and Wentworth were brought out here, as you know, as convicts on ships and Cooper became the largest, I think I could say, the biggest landholder that Australia would ever know.

14.04 Amazing, isn't it? Let alone Wentworth, of course, who was a highway robber four times. He knew the right people, so they put him on a ship rather than a gaol.

MB: So the Cooper Estate, who was the last of the Coopers, like where did the estate - - -

MR: Well, there's a Cooper, a knighted Cooper now, hereditary knight in London, and like a lot of these people have probably gone through their dough. I'm just trying to show you this because I understand - sorry, I should have had these marked. Theatre Royal we sold, last of the Cooper collection. I'll show you this house but it still stands and he's having trouble with council, has had for years, heritage. That's the girls' high school. Have you got some time with me fiddling around with these things?

MB: No, that's fine.

MR: You've pulled that down, you wretched people. That's where we started.

MB: By "you wretched people" you mean the council?

MR: The council. Wentworth Court in early 1900s. Three stories is a tall high-rise in those days. There it is. It still stands today.

16.18 **MB: What are we looking at here?**

MR: Cleveland House.

MB: Cleveland House, yes.

MR: In Chalmers Street beside the railway and that's where he ended up with acres and acres around him, of course. And fortunately one bloke owned it and it's more or less as it was. I think he's trying to renovate it somehow. And there's the Point Piper Estate, for example. That's just telling you that's where they owned Woollahra, Double Bay, Bellevue Hill, Edgecliff, just part of them but they were Waterloo and all your areas. Waterloo Mills, Cooper and Levy. I don't know if you want me to go through all this: Waterloo, Redfern, Cleveland Estate, the Government Paddock, Surry Hills.

MB: And you said that Raine & Horne came off the back of that.

MR: Yes, but my grandfather somehow got himself a job with Mr Horne who managed the estate at Vaucluse for the Wentworths and then when Horne decided to retire from that job - we're looking at the Wentworth Estate - they owned a lot of Illawarra as well - then he and Horne and Raine started their real estate agency - they never called it that in those days - in Wentworth Court and all the Cooper Estate went with him or he got it somehow and he managed all that.

18.00 Well, that'd keep a hundred real estate agencies going today. So that's how Raine & Horne started, on the back of the Wentworth

Estates and the back of the Cooper Estates, plus many others as well.

MB: So to become a company as big as this one is now, you need a pretty solid ground to work on.

MR: Well, yes. There'd be no way that anyone could get ahead like that today because there's not those sort of landholdings. But if you want to know anything about the Cooper Estates – it is in your area too – the library at Double Bay's got oceans of that.

MB: Yes, I might have a look at that later. So on your way up through the company – you said you started as an office boy and then you were collecting rents and what then? Were you working around the Sydney area?

MR: Yes, yes, greatly, because that was the only office we had, in 70 Pitt Street and then Pitt and Hunter Street and you automatically get to know the area and work upwards in the sort of properties you're dealing with.

MB: So you would have been doing commercial as well as residential?

MR: Yes, much later, much later. You're broken in with all sorts of residential, the usual questions and answers about property management and rents, and then you get into commercial, such as it was in those days - nothing like it is today – and you'd end up doing that, managing buildings, high-rise buildings. I always remember one: six stories high it was, down at Central Railway, I always remember that for a certain reason but that was a high-rise building in those days, six or seven stories.

MB: Six stories, yes. So that would have been, what, in the '50s?

MR: Yes.

MB: So you must have seen an awful lot of changes around the CBD.

20.00 MR: Oh, yes, definitely, fantastic, and Raine & Horne's had a part of it in those early days of consolidating sites and a great deal with the city council in Leon Carter's [former Town Clerk] day – I don't know if you remember him.

MB: I do.

MR: We've had some amusing incidents together, Mr Carter and I, dealing with landlords and we put together the site opposite the Town Hall

where Woolworths, a pub, Diamond Traders I call it on the other corner, Pitt Street. And last time Leon rang me you had another lord mayor that stated that he was doing this, his creation, and we laughed together because that's about the third lord mayor which has claimed that's their park. It was exactly the same as the transactions that Leon and I did about a hundred years ago.

MB: Well, it's being claimed again, isn't it

MR: Yes, Leon, yes. too, good on him. But we had a lot of fun dealing with the pub there. I've got a long story about that.

MB: What about things like the standard of housing? When you said you were collecting rents around terraces like these were working class areas, weren't they?

MR: Very much workers.

MB: What was the standard of housing like and how have you seen that change over the decades?

MR: Well, don't forget you had a war from '39 to '45 and you could say virtually the war went on as far as housing growth for another ten years after that.

MB: What do you mean by that?

MR: Well, by getting materials and labour to remedy the housing because a great number of roofs, drains, downpipes and God knows what needed to be attended to, so there was a lack of skilled labour, good skilled labour.

MB: And houses in a fairly poor state of repair?

22.00 MR: Yes, yes, yes, all needing – well, not all but a great number of them needing a tremendous lot of repairs. As I said earlier, the councils, particularly Waverley and no doubt Woollahra and probably the city, gave orders to all the landlords to do the sewerage, the drainage and the whole rest of it.

MB: And the landlords responded quite often by selling the property?

MR: Selling, yes.

MB: Can you remember much about what happened during the baby boom and the population boom in the '50s? Because it wasn't just babies, it was migration as well.

MR: Yes. Well, now you mention migration, I think that's had the single factor that's had the most effect on values. Can I tell you – I have a short story.

MB: Please do.

MR: I was selling residential at that stage from Double Bay office – or city office, actually – and we had a lot of 'new Australian' clients. You get to know them very well indeed. In those days the Greek people had a monopoly on meat trade of New South Wales, I suppose, and I'm thinking of the Aroneys and the Patiros and the Harrises – I'll run through about six of them – Carrs, but then I'm going to jump ahead now to a man called Ervin Graf who was to my mind one of the great property people. He and Albert Scheinberg started Stocks and Holdings. Graf, I think, began in the back of a shed up at somewhere, rather like Frank Lowy - well, he started a delicatessen shop. Fantastic opportunity to those sort of people and I got to know Graf very well. We did a lot of work for him and Scheinberg.

24.05 I was showing him houses and we were looking west and I said – well "Mr Graf, Mr Raine", that's all gone by the board too today – I said "You're looking west, into the western sun, and you always get it a lot cheaper because people don't want the western sun" but then I said to him in so many words "What is it about people who've come to the place more recently, why do they want this western sun?" He said "Mr Raine, most of us are in the factories from early hours in the morning and don't get home till three or four and that's when we want the sun". Easy explanation and, of course, they led the mob to the west, I think at Wolseley Road, Point Piper and the Lowys and the bloke who owned all those Solomon Lew shops and several of them took that western sun. And before that, if you look back all the blinds would be down I think that's a very significant feature. I think of the races that have come to Australia the Greeks would have had the greatest footprint on what you were saying, change, because of their wealth. And they taught personally me two things – I love the Greeks, many of them good friends – they taught to have faith in property, which my father didn't teach me, and a faith in Australia. Because in those days they didn't have that faith in Australia that we have brought up with today, more so my son. But they taught me faith in property, not old Aussies. Strange when you look at the Cooper Estate.

26.06 **MB: I think the Greeks were very instrumental also in reviving some of the inner areas around Sydney, Surry Hills and around there, is that right?**

MR: Well, they were in the meat trade in a big way and some of them would start off with just owning a butcher shop and they'd buy the butcher shop. In fact, I owned property in Paddington – over there originally it was a butcher shop and that's how they got ahead but they emphasised faith in Australia; they thought it was the promised land and they still do. I could rattle off all their names to you.

MB: I was thinking, really, about around the '70s when Surry Hills and other places were regarded as slums and there was talk of mass demolition but the people who actually occupied those houses - - -

MR: They were mostly renters in there.

MB: Were they?

MR: Now, you're saying 1970s?

MB: Yes. Actually made them a viable concern and said "Well, what's wrong with them? We can live here and do O.K".

MR: And interesting, those sort of houses you're talking about, they'd be seven hundred and fifty thousand to a million plus.

MB: Now.

MR: Yes, now.

MB: But very cheap then, I think.

MR: Yes, yes, because no one was into terrace house living and it was looked down on a bit socially, I suppose you could say.

MB: What do you think changed that, why did it change?

MR: Well, I suppose for a number of factors that in earlier days a lot of people had a maid or a cleaner daily or whatever and the terrace houses are certainly compact, easy to run, both the garden and the house, and I think it's just a change of what, I suppose as much as anything else, what women wanted.

28.03 It was compact, repairs to a terrace house were pretty moderate compared with what it would be to a falling-down mansion, and today it's still the same, it's still heavy demand for a homelike unit, homelike unit.

MB: Meaning -?

MR: Well, not too condensed, something with a decent outdoor living, decent approach, one decent living room. Some of those terrace houses had – particularly when you mention Redfern and Surry Hills – were houses there that are a dream with big living rooms, they've all got a bit of a front garden, back garden but a big living room, big entertaining room. And when the recession came and knocked the hell out of – you don't have to tell me, you know these things – knocked the hell out of a lot of people living in large homes in the eastern suburbs, your Vacluse, Bellevue Hills and all the rest of it, to go to a terrace house wasn't a great fall because a lot of those terrace houses were just as gracious and grand with their entertaining rooms – and I can think of many of them with wonderful living room and dining room connected – and so it wasn't such a fall.

MB: Which recession?

MR: And that's cushioned the price falls in Paddington. Now I'm trying to think what year that was? What was that recession?

MB: You mean the recent – you're not talking about the global financial crisis?

MR: No, no, I'm talking about years ago.

MB: Well, there's been a number, haven't there because there've been various recessions and credit squeezes and so on? So there was one in the '90s, a recession and in the '80s.

MR: No, before that, '80s, before that.

MB: '70s?

MR: '70s, yes, that's probably the one I'm thinking about. And there was quite a flow from people selling their more expensive houses to still have the same geography and the same social prestige, if you like, and they've stayed there ever since, most of them, because they're very gracious homes.

30.11 They were the more upper class – not upper, terrible word – more grander terrace houses than you get around Underwood Street and places all around there, Caledonia Street, dah, dah, dah; they were all smaller terrace houses. Still awfully nice to live in because you've got land front and back.

MB: And Paddington is now a very, very desirable suburb isn't it?

MR: Very. Oh, yes, they're paying three or four million, some of them.

MB: Although I understand it's rather sensitive to shifts in the economy, isn't it, Paddington, as a particular area?

MR: Well, I suppose all real estate market is, really. No, I wouldn't think any more than anywhere else. It's close to the city.

MB: It is very close, yes. What about in your early days? Were there many people actually living in the CBD?

MR: The Astor, Macquarie Street.

MB: That's quite a grand address.

MR: Yes, yes, a very rich address in those days. I think there's a much more of a – something you said earlier, I was trying to think what the answer was – there's much more of a understanding about people of where north, south, east and west is, sun and all the rest of it and views, but there's certainly an emphasis on views, not necessarily the harbour but just any view.

MB: More than there was?

MR: More than there was, yes. And you've also excited my mind about where we're sitting now, The Rocks. Well, you couldn't give it away, a house in The Rocks in my early days, until almost yesterday. Yes, I headed a commission for the Labor or Liberal government – headed one for the Labor government, one for the Liberal government and it looked at The Rocks – and I should have got that out – inquiry into housing and this sort of housing.

32.16 And we'd said "You ought to sell it all off", which of course was bad news for the Labor government, so they didn't but they are now selling it off. And you'll see a great value increase there as over the years as the people do up their houses, different sort of people move in – sorry to put it that way but different sort of people.

MB: Well, wealthier people I think you mean.

MR: Yes, wealthier people and there's been some marvellous restoration work there already. I'm thinking of the Fairfax, [Caroline] Simpson woman with her gallery there, wonderful restoration, glorious, and there again enormous wealth so they do it as a hobby.

MB: And I think some of those houses now, the larger ones, are being sold as ninety nine year leases.

MR: Are they? Yes.

MB: Yes, which is a pretty unusual arrangement in Australia.

MR: They probably did that politically. That wretched Clover Moore [Lord Mayor of Sydney].

MB: “Wretched” in inverted commas.

MR: Yes, yes, definitely. Well, I've told you my high price for which she does things. We brought out our inquiry recommendations and she, being the government, got a copy. One of the recommendations amongst many was encourage people to let off their rooms as in days of old. And, of course, she got onto it and said “Now they're trying to let your room off to drug addicts” or whatever she was saying. Good politician though, didn't take any injury from it, but it is a pity – and getting back to something you said first – that is one of the changes. In those days, so many people would have a room to let, or rooms, for company and for financial security, and they don't do that today but that was one of the recommendations of the inquiry into housing.

34.16 **MB: I think I remember that. I think that was in the '80s when you did that report.**

MR: I could get it out, yes. Yes, that was quite interesting, doing that.

MB: But perceptions of that kind of thing have changed, haven't they?

MR: Yes, yes. It looks unusual to have a boarder, but today there are so much better designs. I'm delighted to see that granny flats are coming in and granny houses and you can buy them over the counter, virtually, with designs and all the rest of it. I think that's a marvellous way of using backyards and putting more people in. I think it's always more desirable not to have people 'round usually, but as a way 'round for having a one bedroom house in the backyard is very nice, I think, to overcome the housing problem.

MB: What about credit squeezes? They must have had an impact on your business at various times.

MR: Well, they always do because it stops the volume of sales. Whether it's up or down, it doesn't matter, it stops the volume. So negativity, and there's substantial negativity around now for obvious reasons when you read the press about the economy and I don't think we know we're alive in this country. That's what my Greek friends say.

MB: Do they? Well, relative to Greece's current situation which is not a very happy one at the moment, Australia's looking very healthy.

MR: Yes, very healthy indeed.

MB: Also in the '70s there were some major crashes of developers. Was it Mainline?

35.58 MR: My great friend, Dick Baker, yes, who's my age, married a beauty girl of California, whatever they called them in those days, a Miss California, and he's a grand fellow – good footballer – and his father was a good builder in the eastern suburbs; you can tell his blocks of flats. But Dick, like some builders, a bit overstretched himself and I think the ANZ Bank were not good in the way they deal with that because they had all these assets all of a sudden and the people who did well out of it were – a woman who's just died, Lewis - Concrete Constructions, terribly well out of it because they were able to nominate their own prices to finish off some of the project. Always sad. And Dick lives in America all the time. I mention him because he was – well, you really did that – one of the biggest crashes, not from a monetary point of view but from identity, I suppose.

MB: And what about others? Was Parkes one of the developers who might have crashed at one stage there in the '70s?

MR: Parkes. Gosh, you're testing. He was a dreadful man. No, you're thinking of Rose Bay Avenue.

MB: Am I?

MR: First on the left and next opposite Cranbrook. What was his name? He had to have double wire and security all the way 'round. He's the bloke who was meant to have done something about Rosaleen Norton in Kings Cross. What the hell's his name?

MB: Rosaleen Norton or - - -

MR: Rosaleen Norton was her name, wasn't it, who disappeared?

MB: Not the woman who ran the newspaper. No, Juanita Nielsen.

MR: Juanita Nielsen, yes, she disappeared and he was blamed for that.

MB: Not Thiess?

MR: Thiess might have been his name. He had Victoria - - -

MB: Street, the battle for Victoria Street.

38.01 MR: - - - Street there, the battle for Victoria Street, yes, which is still a beautiful street, irrespective of – Theeman.

MB: Theeman, was it? I beg your pardon. Frank Theeman, that's correct.

MR: Frank Theeman, yes.

MB: And there were some pretty wild times around Victoria Street, that development, because the Builders Labourers Federation was involved in that. Did you ever come up against them in any particular stoushes?

MR: No. I don't know how much time you've got but there's one that always amuses me with Jack Munday. The glorious little two-storey stone house at the top of Woods Lane, Woollahra, off Queen Street, stands there, beautiful rectangle, and the owner of this big site wanted to demolish it. So in come the demolishers and Lady Blaxland, living down the road, and Lady Pagan, living down the other road, they were National Trust grandees, thought "Well, this can't happen". They rang up Munday and Munday comes around on his bike, blows his whistle and that was the end of the demolition. Amazing man. You wouldn't have The Rocks but for Munday.

MB: Yes, that's true.

MR: Incredible. He's a Communist.

MB: And in fact Jack Munday Place is named down here just very nearby to where we are now.

MR: Yes, so it should be. We wouldn't have it today.

MB: So you're an admirer of his, are you?

MR: I'm an admirer of people who protect heritage very much. And from a pocket point of view of landowners it does an awful lot for values, long heritage work, does a lot for that. Well, Paddington's a perfect example. And the woman who's died last week – I've just written to the family – is Margaret Harvey Sutton. She was loathed in the Woollahra Council by the landowners. She was an absolute stickler for the heritage of Paddington.

40.01 That was her job as town planner and of course people'd nearly kill her - and she died the week before last - I was reminding her brothers in a letter. And she was absolutely a dynamo and thanks to her, Paddington's what it is today. You've only got to let one through and you let the lot through.

MB: Yes, as we've said before, very, very valuable areas now thanks to the architectural integrity of - - -

MR: But also proximity to workstations is a very big thing and I think the City of Sydney with apartments has a long way to go.

MB: So what would you like to see?

MR: Well, there are not so many places to see it, high-rise residential, not so many places really. I'm looking at that thing there. You'd have to get right back in - - -

MB: A painting of Circular Quay.

MR: - - - Circular Quay, way back up those streets and you've got to give people a view. So there are some spots there, if you look at the map, that can give a harbour view, even though it's not the main harbour, you know, Sydneysiders do like the water, not just wide open sort of occupied space, they like a Botanical Garden. Just looking at the left hand side of Circular Quay, I'm a great admirer of Paul Keating as far as his planning goes; every time he says something, I always agree with it. And years ago he said "What a pity they ever allowed development on the east side of Circular Quay".

MB: We're talking there about the famous 'Toaster' building?

MR: Yes, and the others. And he said "What a pity. They should take all that down and put it into the Botanical Gardens". And you see great thinkers, "What a pity".

42.06 **MB: Too late now.**

MR: Too late now.

MB: What do you think of his Barangaroo vision?

MR: Well, I'm away from Barangaroo; I haven't really studied that at all. Well, I think that to put a casino there is a disgrace, frankly, and a hotel also but you could argue about that all day.

MB: Well, it's probably not a done deal just yet.

MR: No, doesn't look like it.

MB: Maybe in time.

MR: I'm sorry that the Lord Mayor got off that committee. I could quite see why there's a conflict, so wiser for her to do it but she has a sound mind in planning matters or appears to.

MB: If we can just talk about the CBD a bit more, what do real estate agents in general think about the increasing numbers of residential dwellings within Sydney's CBD? I understand it's actually quite difficult to convert a commercial building into a residential building.

MR: Oh, impossible I'd say.

MB: Can you just tell me a bit about that? Because you get the impression that it's going on apace but I think it's probably not nearly as fast as people are imagining.

MR: No, no, it looks as though it's fast because there's been some very tall residential, very expensive residential units built. I'm talking of the inner city, not the Moore Parks and things.

MB: No, we're talking about the CBD really, aren't we?

MR: Yes. I would say it's almost impossible – well, nothing's impossible but very, very difficult to convert an office building into an acceptable residential building. It has been done, I'm sure – I'm trying to think of one – but I think the costs beat them all the time unless it's a most extraordinarily desirable site.

MB: What's that one - I think it's called 'The Hyde', isn't it – is that the one that overlooks Hyde Park?

MR: Yes, yes. Well, that was the old police station, wasn't it? That's the one, yes.

MB: I think so, I'm not sure.

43.55 **MR:** That's the one, yes, yes. I think there's a much greater demand for new buildings, not converted buildings. Converted buildings sometimes have a stigma of what could go wrong that you can't see. And I'm not being critical of the owners or developers or the builders but certain things can go wrong, as you know, with an older reconstruction even if it's the humble house. I mean, you're saying what happened yesterday. Well, yesterday the city was dead after five or six o'clock, absolutely dead. Well, it's not the case now, there's much more activity in the city, and it only comes along with people living in the city. When Clover Moore gets a bit more demonstrative – my God, if I was the lord mayor I would – about this drinking and disgraceful behaviour in the street, in George Street – she seems to do her best or at least having a crack at it and people attacking the bloody police, unbelievable. According to my young grandchildren, whatever, it's not safe to walk down George Street.

That's a terrible indictment of us all to allow it but your Lord Mayor seems to be doing her best to rid all that. If I was a policeman I'd be shooting everybody, I think, with these Tasers, really I would. It's absolutely appalling that a section of the city and sections are really not very safe for people.

MB: And yet even places like Kings Cross which is where there are huge levels of complaint about noisy drunks all through the night, particularly on the weekends, but the demand for residential space there is very high nonetheless.

MR: Yes, because there's very little of it, really, not very much at all, and there's no prospect that one could see that there would be more of any volume.

46.03 Potts Point has come alive only in the last half dozen years I would think and established its own atmosphere and safety. But when you think of Potts Point with its surroundings and safety as against suburbs, you know, Point Piper, Double Bay and all those places, it really doesn't hold up. Now, I'm a great one for inner city living; I think it gives some vibrancy and reason for it all.

MB: You don't live in the inner city yourself?

MR: No, I live in Point Piper. And when you come to think of it, there aren't too many places which have the land area – and I'd say quickly – the height restrictions that permit a tall building, thankfully, thankfully, the council or whoever it is have preserved the sun and air and whatever going onto Hyde Park; I think that's excellent.

MB: With the height restrictions, you mean?

MR: Yes, yes. I think that's very important, so I give them full marks for that.

MB: So you've got a national empire now really, haven't you? Well, it's franchised, isn't it?

MR: Yes, franchise, yes; we don't own any of the offices. And I'll give you the directory around Australia and we were in Malaysia very early on.

MB: Is that right?

MR: I think it might have got the date wrong here too. Fourteen offices in Malaysia in 1977. And we've got a variety: Vanuatu – the less said about Vanuatu the better – soon be in Bangkok hopefully. Terrible, terrible business, dealing with overseas people. They've got a completely different attitude; got to learn the hard way.

48.05 **MB: It's a different setup altogether.**

MR: Yes, exactly. I'd hardly be critical of it. I mean, that's just them but still. I didn't write that, the Real Estate Institute did.

MB: So have you had a few peaks in your career with the company?

MR: Well, I suppose there have been peaks and troughs; it goes just with the market, really. The fact that we are so widespread takes the troughs away because whilst Queensland might be booming you'll find it not quite the same in Sydney or Melbourne; it doesn't all run in a straight line. And I suppose that because you've got – you said an empire; well, it's not an empire – but because you've got offices all over the place it's a tremendous advantage – or should be – to an awful lot of owners, particularly now with China's the king of the world. And if you read the latest figures on employment and investment from China, let alone other places, it is immense, absolutely immense and that's a great plus for Australia. Chinese have been with us since probably the First Fleet and they've been magnificent immigrants. We've got several Chinese offices.

MB: Have you?

MR: Not in China, here.

MB: But Chinese run offices here?

MR: Yes, yes.

MB: And how much of an impact are they having on residential space? Are you aware of Chinese or foreign - - -

MR: Well, I am, only to the extent of Harry Triguboff – good friend. He's the master of building because he gets things built, not half built, a quarter built or anything, he gets things built and he dominates the market.

50.02 I mean if you supplied him with bricks you'd want to make sure you supplied him with bricks, bathroom fittings or anything else, he's such a big, dominant player, made himself a dominant player. But he, in his recent article on overseas rather than Chinese, but overseas interests buying into his units. They're new, they're financeable and they're risk-free, whereas they come to buy your house, well, they've got all sorts of investigations and things, whereas Harry Triguboff stands behind them and stands by their finance sometimes too. So the answer is that there are really not so many successful, consistent builders of home units in the city of Sydney. Green Square might

bring a few more out but it is really a game, I think, for the experienced.

MB: Which Harry Triguboff is very experienced.

MR: Yes. And he has the ability of judging the market and planning accordingly.

MB: He's been around a very long time, hasn't he?

MR: Yes, yes, he has, yes. And so you know, if you were going to buy one you'd know that the thing'd be finished and completed and if it wasn't he'd go and finish it and do something about it. So I'm a great advocate of him because he gets things done; there's not a strike or a blow up.

MB: Are there other developers you feel that way about?

MR: Well, Stocks and Holdings is one that I've lost track of lately but they were – magnificent country, ours – Graf was in a shed when he came here and was given £5,000 by Triguboff. Together they started Stocks and Holdings. Triguboff started everybody off and all sorts of things.

52.05 **MB: Did he?**

MR: Amazing, amazing. I asked him once – a man of few words – he said "I had the good fortune to come before the war".

MB: You think that - - -

MR: Yes, and he supported all – as indeed still there are Australian-Hungarians who support Hungarians, Poles and Greeks and all that sort of thing, give them a start. Magnificent, magnificent.

MB: O.K. Thank you very much for that.

MR: I'm exhausted.

Interview ends