

Oral History Interview with Ken Garrahy

Interviewer: Bruce Carter

Date of interview: 2 September 2005

Location of interview: Ken's home. Also present his partner, Hashem

Reason for interview: Early social groups

Restrictions: None



Log	Summary	Key words
CD1		
0020	Gives date of birth – born Guyra, NSW, 1933	Guyra
0027	Grew up in Guyra until age 14, when family moved to Armidale, NSW	Armidale
0032	Undertook compulsory military training – air force, 6 month period, in Queensland	National Service
0053	Aware by this time that he was gay and “didn’t have the same privileges” as everybody else – refused to give allegiance to the Queen; military officers “didn’t know what to do with me” after ordering he stand in a corner for half a day. Would not give allegiance to any foreigner. “I felt that I didn’t have the same rights as everybody else” as a homosexual.	Queen
0141	Aware of not being heterosexual at a very early age “I didn’t think anything was wrong with it...used to say to my mother ‘oh, isn’t he nice’ ” Mother “thought I was going through a phase, I think” Was 10 or 11.	
0211	Had first sexual experience with another man at age 18, while on holiday in Sydney – a man “who was boarding with my aunt, in Stanmore”. Felt “wonderful” after this experience. He was an older guy, he was 25 and worked in a clothing factory. After that went home to work in Armidale in the bank	Stanmore; Armidale;
0320	This experience “made me all the more anxious to move to Sydney”. Armidale was rather isolated. “Everything was more or less undercover and nobody was aware of others.”	Sydney; Armidale
0346	Worked in banking in various NSW country towns – Tenterfield, Walgett, Griffith, Lithgow, before deciding to move to Sydney “without a job or anything”	Tenterfield; Walgett; Griffith; Lithgow;
0413	Never met other gay men while working in country towns “they were small and closeted, and I suppose I had to play it as straight as I could”	
0434	Moved to Sydney in 1956, at 23 years old, rented room in Ultimo, then moved to Bondi, Summer Hill, Huntley’s Point, boarding with people. Then bought a house at Earlwood, then to a home unit in Campsie	Ultimo; Bondi; Summer Hill; Huntley’s Point; Earlwood; Campsie;
0530	Met other gay men through membership of the Frank Sinatra Fan Club,”and there were a few members in that and I was taken to the Rex Hotel for drinks ...and then my eyes opened and thought oh, this is a place to start meeting people”	Frank Sinatra Fan Club; Rex Hotel;
0600	Bruce asks was this recognition easy for Ken. “different things people would say things like ‘he’s nice’ or somethings in conversation and I kinda latched on to it” It was the Back Bar of the Rex and it was “packed .. but even at that time we didn’t like being seen coming in the front door. I had an old car and would drive it around to the parking lot at the back and come in through the back entrance, because after you had your drinks you went out the front to find out where the parties were”	Back Bar Rex Hotel;
0645	A lot of people would enter by the back entrance because there was a parking area where you could leave your car -thinks that this had “ a lot to do” with people being closeted.	
0706	Friday and Saturday nights were the nights he went to the Bottoms Up bar/Rex Hotel. Then we branched out and went to Ushers, Phalerts,	Bottoms Up Bar; Ushers; Pfahlerts;
0721	Bottoms Up was a very large bar, attracted a mixed crowd “but predominantly camp as we called it at the time”.	Bottoms Up Bar;

0830	All male clientele – women were supposed to drink in the ladies lounge.	Ladies Lounge;
0838	No entertainment was provided, “it was just getting drunk and catching up with the gossip”, no music in the back bar.	
0859	People formed groups fairly quickly. People would go in groups to a different pub each time. He socialised mainly men his own age various occupations mainly collar workers. One friend had bric a brac shops and introduced Brash furniture into Australia and did radio broadcasts	Brasch Furniture;
1001	Remembers Kings Cross in the 1950s as “a very exciting place, very cosmopolitan, very bohemian ... I found it a safe place to go”	Kings Cross;
1026	”There were artists and different people like that”. Rosaleen Norton, “ a real mixture of people”	Rosaleen Norton;
1155	Would normally arrive at the Bottoms Up around 8pm on Saturday nights, bar would close at 10, “we’d rush and buy our bottles beforehand” – he drank beer, and then organize a party or find out where there was a party on – “the word would go around”	Bottoms Up Bar;
1234	Remembers organising a party at the place he shared in Huntley’s Point and invited 12 people “which we did and over 150 people turned up and there were still some there Sunday afternoon at the house. It was that sort of thing. And you weren’t worried about anybody coming, you didn’t expect to be robbed or bashed or whatever”	Huntley’s Point;
1304	People were heavy drinkers, has no recollection of marijuana or other drugs being used	Marijuana;
1330	Was it cliquey? People would go in a group to the house parties. “We intermixed in as much as everybody knew everybody else (in general)” “It was the usual gossip of who ended up where and with who and whatever.” The house parties went late all through the night because there was nowhere else for us to go, it was before the commercial clubs existed, and with 10 o’clock closing we didn’t want to just make our way home”	
1519	Memorable characters from the Bottoms Up Bar – “Lindsay Stewart who introduced the Brash furniture..a very good person “	Lindsay Stewart; Brasch Furniture;
1539	”...we made Ushers our Friday night special” Ushers bar was next door to the Dug Out bar in the Carlton Hotel, Elizabeth Street in the City. The Dug Out bar was “rather small, and it was mixed but predominantly gay. Ushers was a similar set up and it was a couple of doors away”	Ushers; Dug Out Bar; Carlton Hotel; Elizabeth Street;
1631	Would arrive at these bars around 730, 8 o’clock “more or less just to have a few drinks, and get ready for wherever the parties were”; would go straight from work to these bars; often ended up going to work in the same clothes worn the day before, having not made it home after a night partying.(did anyone at work notice) “I don’t know if they didn’t notice or were just polite”.	
1750	Would see the same faces in the different bars; doesn’t recall different bars attracting different clientele. Didn’t meet foreign tourists, visitors	
1831	The gay bars were the Rex, the Carlton, Ushers, Phalerts, the Town Hall, Tatlers Hotel, Belfields. Ushers was more an after work hotel, while the Dug Out was a Friday night place to go. There was no entertainment at the Dug Out. Just a crowd of people. No women.	The Rex; The Carlton; Ushers; Pfahlerts; Town Hall Hotel; Tatlers Hotel; Belfield Hotel;
2018	Doesn’t recall where lesbians may have met; never knew any in the 1950s (before the club)	
2034	Remembers Merle, barmaid at the Dug Out. She had a little boy and he asked her what she would do if her son grew up to be gay. “That will never happen. She said I’m going to have him circumcised” despite working for years in a gay bar, feels she didn’t understand homosexuality. She would always have a beer poured for me when I got to the bar through the crowd. She worked there for several years.	Merle;

2126	"Pfahlerts was also known as the Fishbowl because I think because a lot of curious straight people used to sit upstairs ...you could view the bar from upstairs and they would go up and see and watch us drinking" Pfahlerts was located near Wynyard	Pfahlerts; Fishbowl; Wynyard;
2226	Mainly an after work people they were friends who would work in offices at the same time and we would meet there "not nearly as big as the Rex or anything...it was a moderately sized bar I guess with a centre bar and it was a quieter kind of bar than the others"....."because they were mainly business people so it wasn't as raucous as the other hotels".	
2326	Rough trade could be found at the Welcome Inn, ".also known as the bunch-a-cunts" in Sussex Street, near the dockyards "a lot of navy, and sailors used to go there"	Welcome Inn Bunch a cunts
2452	Did work in a wool firm after the bank for 12months, then an insurance company for 3 weeks, then joined the public service and worked in a variety of departments – Mines, Tourism, Housing Commission, Education	
2524	Liked working at Education because of "the type of people" and there we more gays working in the Education Department than other departments	Department of Education
2551	People would do beats, but not Ken; "I didn't need to" Popular beats were Hyde Park fountain, Boomerang Street, Regent Street Toilets near Central.	Hyde Park Fountain; Boomerang Street; Regent Street Toilets;
2722	People were "totally aware" of the illegality of homosexual acts during the 1950s – knew of people who were arrested and charged for buggery and "their lives were totally destroyed really". Arrests were not uncommon; detectives would sometimes stop people in the street and question people, asking for their name, occupation, asking what people were doing walking down the street just general questions just to confuse you. "would pick on people standing by themselves so there was no back up...just to make people feel insecure or worried or whatever" Would imagine that a lot would have been falsely arrested.	Buggery
2900	"Police would walk through bars occasionally and that's when everything went quiet but you'd just sip on your beer and try to make out you were totally sober so couldn't come at you for being drunk"	Police
2925	Remembers police coming in to the Purple Onion looking "for an escaped prisoner they said" Purple Onion was located in Kensington, owned by Kandy Johnson. A small room with round tables and chairs it was licensed. You could take your drink or buy your drink there and there was an entrance fee of course and a stage show drag shows". Showtime was after 9pm, would get very crowded. There were familiar faces from the Rex and the city pubs there. "usual drag shows, fairly professional I guess". Remembers the Purple Onion closing after midnight.	Purple Onion; Kandy Johnson; Kensington;
03258	Had heard of places paying off the police. Various clubs around Oxford Street. Rumours police were paid to keep a blind eye to whatever because some of the clubs were fire hazards, as far as fire escapes were concerned. And it would have cost a lost to change"	Oxford Street; Police;
03518	Never came out to parents "mother would have accepted it, my father wouldn't have". Would tell mother about doing drag at Boomerangs events, she was fine with that.	Boomerangs;
03655	Thinks attitudes today are much better than they used to be, but is concerned by fundamentalism in Christian churches and in Islam.	Christianity; Islam;
03832	Attitudes in 1950s "very bad, we were more or less treated as considered to be just pedophiles and garbage I think, yes, you lived a double life, you just had to, no ifs or buts about it"	Paedophiles;
03905	Coming out in the 1950s "It was dangerous for employment and everything else if you came out. And at the time too it was more or less an unwritten law that you never outed your own people."	

04025	“There was definitely (a climate of fear among homosexuals). It was always at the back of your mind ...that you might be arrested, if you lost your job, what would you do? Once you were arrested was difficult to get another job of any value ... I did yes (know people this happened to) “you’d just wait for the gory details to come out in the paper” Papers would report that “so and so has been found guilty of sodomy or buggery”. (the fear of being exposed) ‘was always there”	
04136	Despite the day to day fear of being arrested, “we didn’t let it get to us...I think that’s why once the community started galvanizing and forming there clubs there was an attitude of ‘we’ve had enough, we’re not going to take it anymore type of thing, we’re here and we’re going to do it – we’re going to have our dances and we are going to enjoy ourselves’ just like you others ” – feels this happened mid-60s or a bit before.	
04223	Unsure what this change in mood was brought on by, perhaps “the swinging. 60s...there was no meetings, it just came together”. Groups of people “started going for picnics, to Bundeena and elsewhere, and if they found a nice spot they, and there were groups of families there, we would surround them and then they would feel uncomfortable and move away we had the spot, because that was how they made us feel (uncomfortable)...it worked every time, there was no aggression or nasty things spoken”	Bundeena;
04331	Were you recognized as homosexuals? “I don’t really know. They felt as if they were the odd people out”.	
04341	These picnics were organised in the 60s.Started to organize activities – dances, car rallies, ferry trips.	
04353	Dances would be held all over Sydney, wherever a cheap hall could be hired – Bexley School of Arts, Masonic Hall at Bexley, Council Hall Botany, Communist Party hall in Sussex Street, Catholic Church Hall Annandale	Bexley School of Arts; Masonic Hall Bexley; Council Hall Botany; Communist Party Hall Sussex Street; Catholic Church Hall, Annandale;
04425	Was At this time there was no particular part of Sydney where homosexuals were living? “No probably the eastern suburbs. ...We would get a hall where ever we could afford it. We were running on very small amounts of money.” From the people Ken knew there seemed to be more in the eastern suburbs. Bondi, Coogee, the beach suburbs, Potts point.	Bondi; Coogee; Potts Point;
04522	What he feel has been lost is that drugs have changed the gay community - today “ you couldn’t ask a large crowd of people to your home...you wouldn’t know what would happen” Didn’t have the same fears back in the 50s/60s “everybody was welcome” at house parties then	House Parties;
04553	Ferry cruises – straights getting on the ferry by mistake – “ ‘I think we’re on a poofers ferry’, I said well you’re right there mate so you better shut up, and he spent the night going ‘round the harbour”	Ferry Cruises;
04627	On a Polly’s cruise, a straight married man got on the ferry by mistake, when he got off said he’d never had such a good time in his life “but I don’t know how I’m going to explain it to my wife”	Pollys;
04648	Boomerang Social Club was formed in 1967– one of six clubs that lasted over a period of years – Chameleons were first, then Kooringals, Tiffanys, Chelsea Players, us and the Polynesians. “The demand just didn’t seem to be there later once all the commercial clubs opened.”	Boomerang Social Club; Karingals; Tiffanys; Chelsea Players; Polynesians;
04736	Boomerangs formed by a group of us who used to meet in the Dug Out bar – “somebody said one night why don’t we form a club, so that was it. We ran a raffle on	Boomerangs; Dug Out Bar;

	the first night to get the money back that we had put into it and it went from there” – can’t remember what was raffled	
04802	We would run a function and keep enough to finance the next and we would give the rest of the money to charities – the seeing eye dogs because there were no gay charities at that time”	Seeing Eye Dogs;
04824	Car rallies – would start in the city or at the Gardens and end up at Castle Hill, on a ground owned by the Uniting Church, to have a BBQ. The church “was not aware of who we were”. Car rallies would attract 150 people, harbour cruises a full ferry 80-100.	Car Rallies; Castle Hill;
049:34	Harbour cruises would have music tapes “current dance music” and floor shows “they were pretty terrible really. You would have a sound system down one end and a drag queen up the other end going (?) the lips moving and no sound coming out but it was just to break up the night really”.	
050:26	People would bring their own alcohol. We had to get a licence number from the police for people to bring their grog along. “We didn’t have to pay anything we just had to get a number”	
050:43	No problem getting a licence except once at Annandale, where the police said “ ‘here’s the number but we don’t want your type here again’, so we finished the night and the next day we decided to book the hall again as soon as possible, have another dance, we did and there was no problem” this was the only problem with police.	Liquor Licence; Annandale;
051:22	The club had a private mailing list. They got people to put their names and addresses down when they came to the first few. We kept 2 mailing lists in case there was a raid or something and we had to destroy one before the police got there. We’d always have another one somewhere so that we could keep the communication going.” The second list was kept at another house. Once the Star Observer was established we did advertise then.	Mailing list; Star Observer;
05306	The ferry for the cruise was a Haggerty’s ferry. Small ferry	Haggerty’s ferry;
05336	“The club was structured with a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and social secretary. There was about 20 of us at its height”	
054:05	People were coming from all over Sydney. “We tried not to have functions the same night as any other club, so that there would be something, somewhere for people to go each time.”	
054:27	What was the attraction? “I think it was the dancing and a laugh at the show because they were pretty amateurish. A lot of the time we depended on the humour being with the things that went wrong. That it was just a change from the usual. It went well for many years. 1967 for 28 years late 80s. “Well by that time (toward the end) unfortunately a few drag queens had taken over and they seemed to want the club as an excuse just to get up in drag and whatever and there wasn’t much interest in the club I think and it just kind of folded.”	
055:41	Ken was a member for 10, had a break and went back for 5.	
055:50	The coffee shops. Ken remembers the Kashmir opposite the Rex in Macleay Street. “That’s where people if they weren’t going to a party whatever would go over there for a coffee and meet somebody. Rosaleen paintings were all around the walls. It was very small and it didn’t accommodate many but it was popular place to go”. It was open late. Some of the Repin’s Coffee Shops in town. The California was a Coffee Lounge as well.	Kashmir Coffee Shop; Rosaleen Norton; Macleay Street; Repins; California Coffee Lounge;
057:19	The rise of activism. What did Ken think about all that? They were exciting times	
05845	Ken talks about overseas travel. Went to Fiji and got to know people in Fiji very quickly.	Fiji;
1;00;58	Were the activists different to the people going to the club events? “Yes I think so. I mean, it was so much fear every where in our community that I think that the activists	

	were. It probably started out with the extreme left wing. The rent a crowd. But it kind of spread you know.”	
1:02:10	Was it better then, being a gay man? “I suppose it was exciting ... we were a very close knit community.” “I feel that we were a closer knit community then than we are today”.	
1:03:11	What was worse? “I think it was job security. Would you involve yourself in this or would you lose your job because of it? That’s actually why I wasn’t involved in the actual marches, because if I got arrested I would lose my job, superannuation, everything that I had built up over the years, you know.	
1:03:49	The Town Hall Hotel. People would meet at the upstairs bar. But it was mixed it wasn’t obvious	Town Hall Hotel;
CD2		
00:13	Criterion hotel was popular, and fairly rough – on corner of Pitt and Park Sts. It was pretty wild. People got drunk. Got talking to two men at Criterion who turned out to be detectives from Adelaide. They said “we are looking for ...do you know him?”, we said “know him?, Christ, love, I’ve slept with him...they laughed...that was the type of pub it was, you could say what you liked, the one’s that weren’t camp were accepted everything”	Criterion Hotel;
00:2:00	To Ken’s knowledge there were no differentiation of homosexual meeting places. They were fairly homogenous type of crowd.	
00:2:27	“The only club that wasn’t with us was the Clover Club for the girls and they formed their own club which was good because they had their own thing and whatever. But with the Boomerangs and the other clubs we did mix. We had girls as well as boys in the clubs ... probably a quarter (of Boomerangs were lesbians) and they held office. Ran the floor shows and everything, never thought we never thought, you know, everyone was just camp. We didn’t think about boys or girls or anything be aware of that in the dressing rooms when the shows were on everybody was in together. Nobody bothered looking because we weren’t interested in the opposite sex”	Clover Club; Boomerangs;