

The Millers Point Public Housing Community

Its Cultural Practices
as
Intangible Cultural
Heritage

Anne Warr ICOMOS Nov 2019



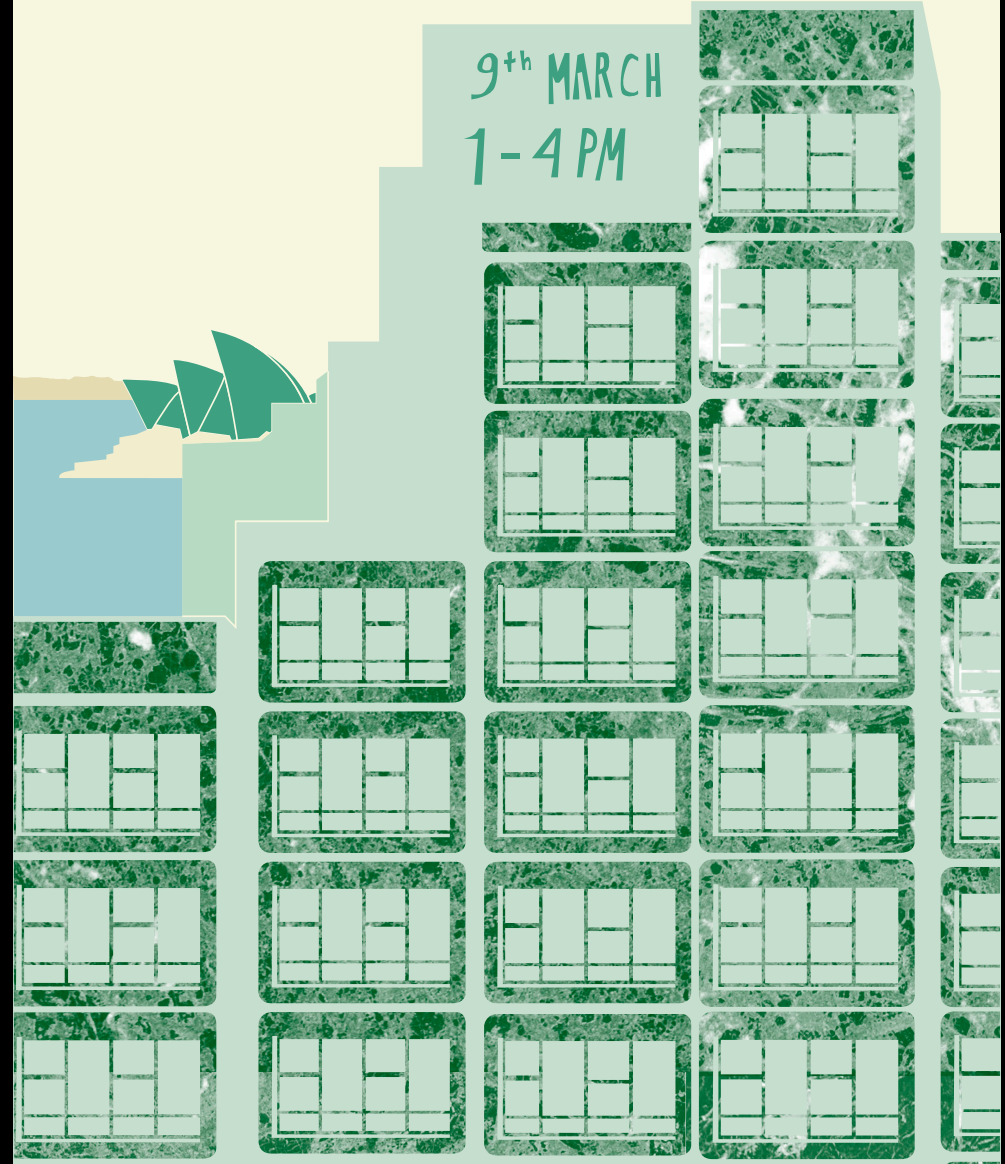


WORLD
MONUMENTS
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WORLD MONUMENT FUND + SAVE OUR SIRIUS

WATCH DAY!

9th MARCH
1-4 PM



Gadigal Land

Outline

1. **Background:** short film on history of social activism in Millers Point.
2. **The Thesis:** Do the cultural practices of the Millers Point public housing community contribute to the social significance of Millers Point. *And if so, How?*

NSW State Heritage Register Listing - Millers Point

1.2 It demonstrates a complex layering of activities and events, ranging from early colonial merchant ...to 20th century corporate port town and **setting for social planning**

1.3...the experiences **and memory of its long term community**

1.4 Its **public housing** and its development into a Government corporate town were probably the first such development in Australia (apart from first settlement) and may be **of international significance.**

What are the heritage values of Sirius?

Architectural

- important example of brutalist architecture
- important component of Sydney's architectural history and heritage

Social

Sirius embodies

- the social and political struggles of the mid 1970s
- a time of growing awareness, locally and internationally, of the value of the historic environment
- the recognition of citizens rights in the formulation of public policy
- a time that demanded social equality
- A time when harbor views could be enjoyed by rich and poor.

Brutalism as an expression of an egalitarian society

From the mid-1950s, international approaches in architecture began to be influenced by the English New Brutalist movement, pioneered by the office of architects Alison and Peter Smithson. The movement espoused an ethical framework of design based on social concerns and the truthful expression of materials, function and structure.

The design of the Sirius Apartments represented a proposition for an urban habitat, an interest in urban living, and can be understood as a legacy of a moment when governments believed that all citizens were deserving of quality urban housing. Ibid p. 73

Brutalism had come to satisfy a need for monumental architecture, to be seen to be the image of the democratic attributes of a civil society. Ibid p. 74

Sirius reflects heroic ambitions, both socially and architecturally. Through its direct and honest aesthetics, Sirius presents a powerful civic image that communicates the potential role played by the built environment in the lives of a society's inhabitants, a role focused on the culture of the everyday, a powerful image of an egalitarian ideal expressed in architecture. Ibid p. 75

Rodrigo, R. 2015, 'Aesthetics as a Practical Ethic', *Fabrications* Vol 25, No. 2, 234-261.

The modular spaces and forms of Sirius parallel the Brutalist desire for the expression of an egalitarian society, with the standardisations of forms reflecting an aspiration for social cohesion and for the communal good.

Designed Sirius



Perspective by Alan Patterson

Just completed Sirius - 1980



1990s Sirius



Composed Sirius



Modular Sirius



Glenn Harper 2016





Glenn Harper 2016



Private Sirius





Contextual Sirius

Social Sirius



Stylish Sirius



*Split
level
Sirius*





*Interior
Sirius*



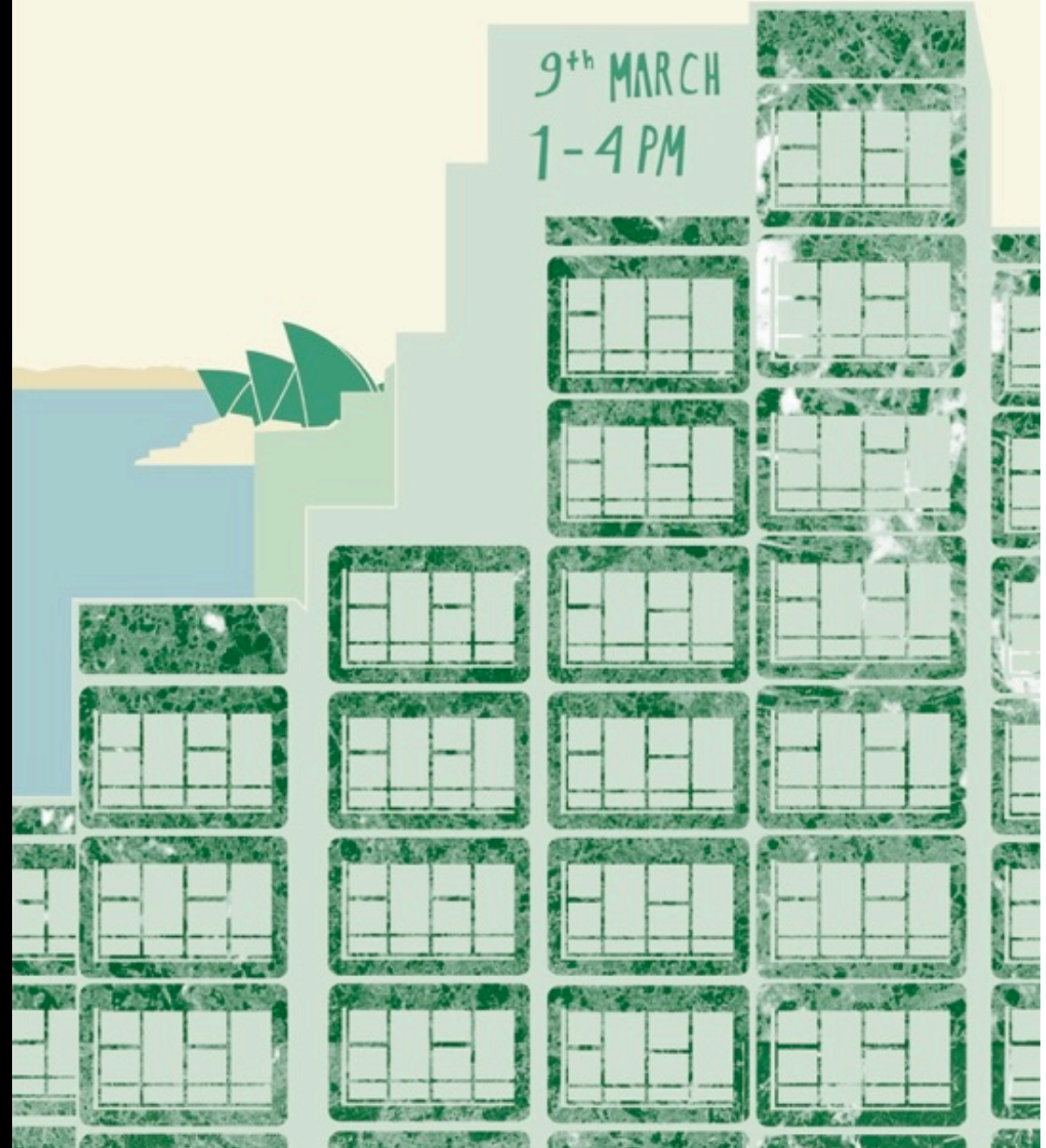
Myra's Sirius



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9th MARCH
1-4 PM



International
Sirius

Tweet Share Print

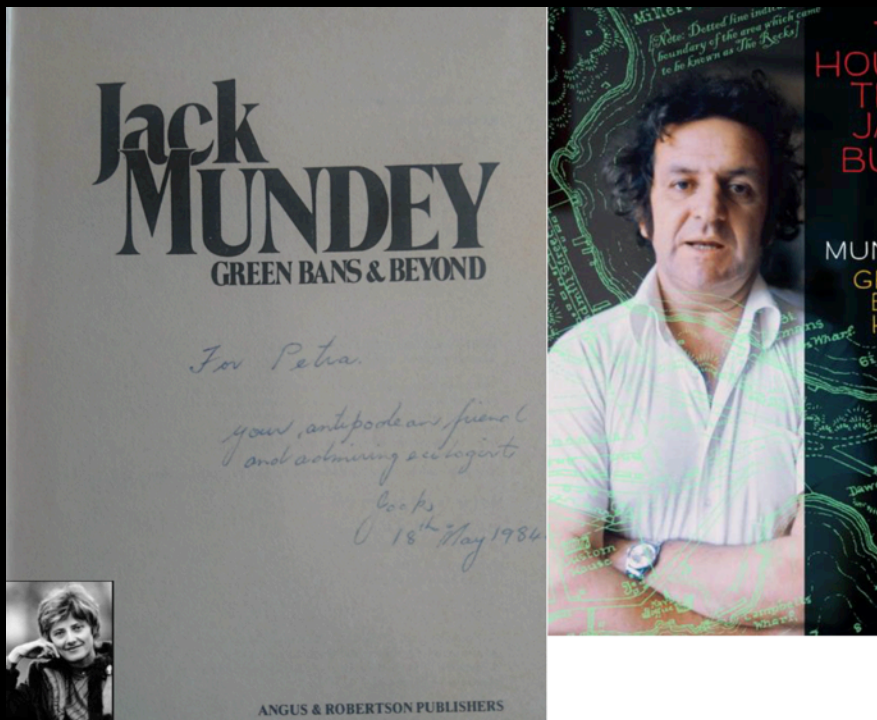


Petra Kelly Archives

The Petra Kelly archive contains the written legacy of Petra Karin Kelly. It is a unique resource on the history of the Green Party and of the global movements against the nuclear threat and for disarmament, peace, human rights, and emancipation. By providing the public with access to Petra Kelly's extraordinarily prolific writings, the archive honours the memory of her remarkable personality and strives to promote her ideas for a new political culture.



Petra Kelly Archive, Berlin



Cultural Practices

What are the cultural practices of the Millers Point Public Housing Community?

Millers Point captures the changing nature of Australia's economy over the course of the 20th century. Right up until the late 1960s, most of the men in the area were employed on the wharves doing hard physical labour. The advent of containerisation and the closure of the wharves in the 1970s and 80s meant the end of that phase. However, the view that the housing should be retained as public housing and families that had a connection to the waterfront should be able to hold onto the housing allocated to them by SHT or the MSB, remained firm.

Morris, A 2019, 'Gentrification and Displacement: The Forced Relocation of Public Housing tenants in Inner-Sydney', Springer Singapore.

Morris argues that:

...longevity of residence, homogeneity, the age profile and the particular history of the area, combined with its urban form, contributed to the development of a strong community that many interviewees portrayed as "unique" and "like a family". Ibid, p. 25

1910



Millers Point. Tram terminus.

H. Cazneau.

The tram terminus at Millers Point, undated photograph by Harold Cazneaux (believed to have been taken c. 1910). nLA nla.pic-an2384442-2

Cultural Practices

What are the cultural practices of the Millers Point Public Housing Community?

Key social features of Millers Point:

1. Longevity of residence
2. Homogeneity
3. Strong sense of social obligation
4. The key physical features championed by New Urbanism to encourage community – walkability, compactness, housing design and public spaces that encouraged informal contacts and high visibility – were also in place. (ibid, p.27).
5. The local pubs, community centre and churches (Garrison and St Brigids) in MP were exemplars of ‘third places’ – places beyond the home and office where people could gather – crucial for maintaining community and wellbeing.

Morris, A 2019, ‘Gentrification and Displacement: The Forced Relocation of Public Housing tenants in Inner-Sydney’, Springer Singapore.

Strong sense of social obligation

- an ingrained view that tenants should look out for one another. (This perception was partially due to the history of MP where employment was often intermittent and neighbours rallied round).
- The strong history of trade unionism fostered mutual assistance.
- Looking after each other's children, doing household repairs and making sure your neighbours were okay, were fundamental features of MP.
- Older people were constantly watched over and this enabled them to age in place.
- A sense of feeling safe in Millers Point...single women spoke about feeling secure day and night.
- There was a perception that 'difference' was highly tolerated.

Morris, A 2019, 'Gentrification and Displacement: The Forced Relocation of Public Housing tenants in Inner-Sydney', Springer Singapore.





A No Surrender t-shirt and a message at the rear of 65 Lower Fort Street, and Charles Walton's 1935 photo of the same corner, a time when former local resident Flo Seckold lived with her family in 57 Lower Fort Street.

Physical features

- The housing architecture, high density, street layout and dependence on walking and public transport, meant that residents would constantly 'bump into' their neighbours and fellow residents.
- The key physical features championed by New Urbanism to encourage community – walkability, compactness, housing design and public spaces that encouraged informal contacts and high visibility – were also in place. (ibid, p.27).
- The urban form of the area encouraged a great deal of informal contact.

Morris, A 2019, 'Gentrification and Displacement: The Forced Relocation of Public Housing tenants in Inner-Sydney', Springer Singapore.





Third Space

- The local pubs and community centre in MP were exemplars of ‘third places’ – places beyond the home and office where people could gather – crucial for maintaining community and wellbeing.
- The MP community demonstrated that within the contemporary global city, it is possible for a strong sense of community to prevail.
- Despite globalisation and increased fluidity, studies have shown that the local neighbourhood can still be a central contributor to people’s quality of life.
- The MP displacement and sell-off have accentuated the deep class and spatial divide in Sydney.

Morris, A 2019, ‘Gentrification and Displacement: The Forced Relocation of Public Housing tenants in Inner-Sydney’, Springer Singapore.



Cultural Practices

Could the activities of the outsiders who came together to support the public housing tenants staying in Millers Point be considered to be ICH?

The public sale of MP housing and of the Sirius building have brought together many groups of people to form a community who supports the public housing tenants staying in the area. Is this community of ICH?

Since 2014, grass roots groups, including SOS, have been raising awareness of the heritage values of Sirius.

Sirius has been on the World Monuments Fund Watch List since 2018.

MILLERS POINT PICNIC DAY

*Save your heritage.
Save our community.*

CITY OF SYDNEY  

WALKING TOURS

GUEST SPEAKERS

MARKET STALLS

POLICE BAND

HISTORY TOURS

GAMES FOR KIDS

SYDNEY STREET CHOIR

STAIRWELL TO HEAVEN CHOIR

14

**SEPTEMBER
10 - 4 PM
ARGYLE SQUARE**

JACINTA TOBIN

GHOST TOURS

MURAL ART WORKSHOP

FILM SCREENINGS

MORE ACTS TO BE CONFIRMED ...



Many of these stories of the people and places of Millers Point were torn down by NSW Housing officers, but in a few places they survived. They also became the basis of the Millers Point Community website.



Flo on her verandah talking to filmmakers Blue Lucine and Tom Zubrycki. Some of the stories that became the first version of the Millers Point Community website are behind her.



Save Our Community!

Grid of portraits and text on the door.

PODCAST

NOT FOR SALE!

NOT FOR SALE!

PODCAST



Miller Point is historic, especially as it sits on the site of the first wharf in the area of what is now the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It was a busy place, a place of industry and commerce. It was a place where people lived and worked, and where the sea was always just a short walk away.



It was a wonderful community, and I was lucky to be part of it. I remember the days when the sea was always just a short walk away, and the people were so friendly and helpful. It was a place where everyone looked out for each other, and where the sea was always just a short walk away.



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It was an urban village with a real, very strong community feel to it and by that I mean the feeling that everyone passed through the place, the streets, the shops, the services all had a strong connection to it. I think we were still considered as a community. We were this little community that was very, very close to the sea, but never part of the CBD or any other part of Sydney.



There was a certain spirit in the place, a kind of spirit or atmosphere that was unique. I know a lot of the people, the memories, from the 1970s and there was something special about Millers Point. They all liked being there, they liked what they represented. If someone was in need of help, they would come to their aid and help them out, either in the morning or evening or at night. That type of thing, so there was a good community spirit there, I would say.



Because my family were here for so long my love was in the area from that perspective. From me growing up here, from my grandparents being here, getting away in this area, but me it connects me to my mother and my grandparents. Given that these three people were the main important people in my life and they were all here. Being in the area gives me a sense of connection to their memories.



In 2014 the NSW Government encouraged media to report residents of Millers Point did not deserve to live here, just as they had reported during The Rocks Green Bans of the 1970s. "They don't know us" was the response of residents. These images and texts became an outdoor exhibition presenting the people and places of Millers Point.







Peter Chadwick's *Save Our Sirius* posters





Save Our Sirius Rally 17 September 2016

Relating the MP community to ICH principles

The UNESCO Convention (Article 2) defines five *domains* in which intangible cultural heritage can be manifested...

The one relevant to MP community is

Social practices, rituals and festive events: *can include a wide variety of activities that help reaffirm the shared identity of those who practice them. Often, they mark changes or cycles, and commemorate or link to history and memory. Social practices shape everyday life too, reinforcing identity and connection.*

We have investigated the cultural practices of the MP community that relate to an understanding of MP and its cultural significance.

The fabric of the place, and its urbanism, contributed to the cultural significance. The Sirius building symbolises a period in Sydney's history when government was generous to public housing tenants and a sense of social equity pervaded decision making. The Sirius building was such a strong symbol that it brought together people from all over Sydney, and the world, to support the retention of the building and its public housing tenants.

Cultural practices that contribute to the significance of a place should be sustained; in accordance with the wishes and participation of the relevant community. (ICH Practice Note 2017, p.7)

How can the ICH of the MP community be sustained?

1. Retaining the Sirius building
2. Retaining the community spaces in the Sirius building
3. Retaining at least one apartment with its original fit-out
4. Providing interpretation of the century of public housing tenants in MP. Including tours of the Sirius building, its public spaces and the conserved apartment.
5. Appointing a Place Manager for Millers Point – one who will support the cultural practices that are integral to the significance of the place.

It is crucial to the well-being of our city, that the significance of a century of public housing tenants in MP and the community they forged is not forgotten.