

3 September 2015

Attention: Listings Manager

Division of Heritage
Office of Environment and Heritage
Locked Bag 5020
Parramatta NSW 2124
Fax: 02 9873 8599
Email: heritage@heritage.nsw.gov.au

Dear Madam / Sir

The Tenants' Union of NSW represents the interests of residential tenants in NSW and has done so since 1976. We are a not-for-profit co-operative, a community legal centre specialising in residential tenancies law and the resourcing body for the state-wide network of Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services. We seek to represent the interests of all tenants in NSW, including social housing tenants.

The Tenants' Union of NSW supports the listing of the Sirius Building on the State Heritage Register as a building of state heritage significance because it:

- a) is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural ... history;
- b) has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural ... history;
- d) has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- e) has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural ... history.

The European history of Millers Point and The Rocks is largely that of tenants of the Maritime Services Board and their descendants, with ownership of the properties being passed to the state housing authority in the 1990s. The majority of public housing tenants live in the modest flats that were purpose-built for maritime workers, or in the Sirius apartments that were built when local residents and the Builders Labourers Federation saved The Rocks from high-rise development in the 1970s. In contrast to other inner Sydney areas and, against all odds, it has remained a close-knit community.

Indeed, the Sirius Building embodies a long struggle by a group of tenants to remain in their community. A central aspect of the proposed listing is the people living in it and their role in stopping the demolition of Millers Point and The Rocks almost forty years ago.

My organisation concurs with what is stated in the letter dated 15 July 2015 from the Director, Heritage Division, Office of Environment & Heritage, received by residents of the Sirius Building. Particularly, we would like to highlight the Sirius Building having state heritage significance:

... for its historical values as a major outcome of the Green Bans, a protest movement against the development of the Rocks and Millers Point area in the 1970s: The Sirius building was built to provide affordable public housing in its 79 apartments, for approximately 200 people potentially displaced by other developments in the area.

... for historical associations with the Green Bans of the 1980s, the Green Bans' leader Jack Munday as well as for its association with designer Tao Gofers, a noted architect who pioneered a new modular building style in concrete with specific application to social housing in Australia.

... for its long and strong association with past and present residents of the Millers Point and The Rocks community. Many of The Rocks and Millers Point residents were the descendants of maritime workers who lived and worked in the area for generations. Sirius may also be of social significance to others in NSW who consider it an important achievement that the unique makeup of the Millers Point and The Rocks community has been preserved for so many generations.

The Sirius Building has been one of the great success stories of social housing in New South Wales. The original residents of this building were firmly connected to the area before they moved in. They had fought alongside Nita McCrae, Jack Munday and the Builders Labourers Federation with the world's first Green Bans to save The Rocks from demolition at the hands of the then NSW Government. The Green Bans were lifted to allow Sirius to be built. Another reason for residents living happily together in Sirius is that individual units are well designed, and there is a mix of one, two, three and four-bedroom units to accommodate families, couples and single aged units. At the time it was revolutionary to combine different types of units in a single block, but the success of this approach was soon evident.

At a seminar earlier this year Dr Charles Pickett, noted built environment expert, confirmed the importance of Sirius in Australian architectural history and hailed its success as a public housing building. In the early 1900s the government built model

workers public housing in this area – low-rise and terraces. Sirius is the last major piece of architecture built in this tradition and as such must be retained.

As further support of the criteria cited above for listing, I refer to Housing NSW's own publication 'Millers Point Oral History Project: Summary Report', (April 2007, viewed on 1 September 2015 at <http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/B4A06A4B-5976-4824-90E3-F67322B7B923/0/MillersPointOralHistoryProjectSummaryReport.pdf> on page 6):

Millers Point ... has a very integrated community who love living there and have a sense of belonging and allegiance to the place. ... The residents have a rich reservoir of memories of living at the Point, going, in some cases, as far back as six generations. They were born, worked, lived and died in the houses at Millers Point. They also have a strong sense of history and heritage. It's a community within a community where everyone knew each other through work and place of living.

This excerpt discusses Millers Point, but since its erection, the Sirius Building has been an integral part of this same community. As evidence of this, you need go no further than Maureen, a resident of Sirius. Maureen believes that she walks in the shadows of her ancestor, Mary Ann Curry, convicted at sixteen for stealing and transported to New South Wales where she later met and married a boatman, former marine David Davis who had fought with Nelson. The family still has his medal listing the battles in which he fought, which was made from a melted-down French cannon. Together they lived in Globe Street, The Rocks. One of their sons married Maureen's grandmother who, with their family, moved into the first flat in High Street, Millers Point, when it was completed in 1908. It was here her father grew up, surrounded by his cousins who lived nearby.

Maureen is now in poor health but remains part of the Millers Point community. Their struggle continues to the present time with a decision of the NSW Government, through Housing NSW, to evict all their tenants in order to make way for a totally different demographic of residents, perhaps creating an enclave for the rich.

The Tenants' Union believes that it is appropriate to list the Sirius Building on the State Heritage Register under the Heritage Act 1977.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at email: Julie.Foreman@clc.net.au or telephone 8117 3700 should you wish to discuss this submission.

Yours sincerely

Julie Foreman