DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray and Mr Ian James Perdriau on Friday, the 2nd of July, 1999, at the Sydney Water Police Station in Pyrmont. The time by my watch is 2.30pm. Also present, seated to my right is Senior Constable David Upston from the New South Wales Water Police. For the purpose of record, Ian, could you please state your full name?

A Ian James Perdriau.

Q2 ..... Date of birth?

A 31st of the 5th, '47.

Q3 Your current address?

A 19 Eastview Road, Church Point.

Q4 And your occupation?

A Boat builder.

Q5 O.K. And whereabouts are you located for your business?

A Presently at Birken Head Marina.

Q6 O.K. As I already explained to you, Senior Constable Upston and myself are making inquiries in relation to the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race. We've recently received some information in relation to the Winston Churchill in which some corking or putty near the stem of the, the vessel was missing, about three to four planks. And also on those planks there was evidence of paint cracking. So, basically in your capacity as a, as a boat builder and having some dealings with the

Winston Churchill, we'd like to speak to you today in relation to that matter. Do you understand that?

A All right. Yeah.

Q7 O.K. Now, so far as your experience in boat building, could you give me a background on that?

A I've been building, building and repairing timber boats since I was 14 years of age. So, it makes it about, I don't know, 30 odd years or something.

Q8 Right.

A Mainly timber boats, specialising in them.

Q9 Right.

A I've done ....., I've done, I think, I enter the Hobart races myself so I've got a pretty good idea of, of what's required and, ...

Q10 Right.

A And carried out, do you want me to mention the Churchill?

Q11 Yes, certainly, yeah, well we - - -

A .....

Q11 - - - .....

A I, I, I surveyed the Winston Churchill Christmas time three years ago, yeah, three years ago for Richard Winning. And I, I surveyed it at Woolwich Marina ..... and on the slipway, just structural condition, 'cause it was,it was pretty cosmetically run down.

Q12 I'll just stop you there for a second. Could you explain to me what survey means as far as you're

concerned?

A Well survey is determining the seaworthiness and the, in my opinion, the seaworthiness and the, and the state of construction or deterioration of the whole vessel.

Q13 Right.

A So, I surveyed, surveyed it then, and Richard Winning decided to buy it. And we went through a whole list of requirements about refurbishing the boat.

Q14 Right.

A To sailing it.

Q15 Right.

A Seeing what was needed to, to be done to it.

Q16 O.K. Now, in your survey of that vessel, three years ago, you were satisfied with it so far as it's seaworthiness?

A Yes.

Q17 At that stage?

A With, without a problem, I mean there was a, a problem with the deck - - -

Q18 Right.

A - - - leaking.

Q19 Right.

A But most of the refit work was to be cosmetic.

Q20 O.K. So, was that leak, or that deck fixed where it leaked or -?

A Yes. But it's an inherent problem with timber boats with layered decks, layered - - -

Q21 Right.

A - - - traditional layered decks, that they tend to leak - - -

Q22 Right.

A - - - from time to time, if they don't keep a lot of water on them.

Q23 O.K. Now, what was the actual construction of the, of the Winston Churchill? It's hull and -

A Traditionally ..... plank boat, ... and tyne planking, hardwood ribs, hardwood frames.

Q24 Right.

A Hardwood deck bones and a ..... deck.

Q25 O.K. Now, the thickness of the hull, can you describe that to me?

A The thickness of the hull planking was approximately .....

Q26 Right.

A I would say.

Q27 And that's single plank?

A Single skin.

Q28 Single skin.

A Yeah. Yeah.

Q29 O.K. Now, you might like to, sort of, for the record explain to us how these planks are attached to form the hull?

A Yeah. Attached on the Churchill by copper nails.

Q30 Right.

A And robes, the robe goes on the inside, it's like a big washer. It's robed and in some areas they were

clenched, which means they're just come through the planking, through the rib and then bent over.

Q31 Right.

A Common practise.

Q32 Right.

A In timber boats. Along the, along the stem, stern, keel and all that, they're either screwed and/or nailed without any fastening, without any robes or clenching done to them. Sometimes the nails are twisted so they don't pull out, but it's a common way to do it.

Q33 Right. Now, how much stress is put on those planks when they're in situ, when they're in situation?

A During construction or - - -

Q34 No.

A - - - the boat as a whole.

Q35 No, the boat as a whole.

A As a whole, not a great deal.

Q36 Right.

A I don't consider, it's primary to keep water out.

Q37 Right.

A It's a, it's a skin like a skin on an aeroplane.

Q38 Right. O.K.

A You know, all the framing and structure is, holds it together - - -

Q39 Yeah.

A - - - because it's compound shape - - -

Q40 Right.

A - - - it's very hard for it to compress.

Q41 Yeah.

A You know, it's round boarded from the outside - - -

Q42 Agreed.

A - - - so, in structure they're pretty good.

Q43 O.K. Now, at the stem, where the planks meet the stem, I believe that there's a gap?

A That's right.

Q44 Ordinarily?

A M'mm.

Q45 And that is filled with one of two things. Are you able to explain to me what those gaps are filled with?

A Well, it's, it's, it's called a rabbit line.

Q46 Right.

A Where the planks go into it, it's, it's recessed into a hardwood stem, in this instance.

Q47 Yeah.

A And it was most of the ..... was copper nailed ..... there was some screws put into tit.

Q48 Right.

A Or had been put into it in the past. We, we pulled a lot of the screws out of it to have a look at them just to check the condition of the timber and the fastenings. And they were fine. But, the line that shows up down the end is shrinkage of timber, 'cause the timber's always moving from the moisture content in the air, the humidity, the water, the sun - - -

Q49 Yeah.

A - - - so in that particular sort of construction it's

very hard to keep a really good finish on a boat like that, so ..... all the time.

Q50 Right. O.K. So, that rabbit, you call it, what did you call it?

A Yeah. Rabbit line.

Q51 Rabbit line, are you aware of what that was filled with in respect to the Winston Churchill?

A Most of it would have been a, what they call a corking compound, which is really a very ..... a lot of it is linseed oil putty.

Q52 Right.

A And sometimes some hard fill is put in, but in this instance it's mostly linseed oil putty.

Q53 O.K.

A Over the top of the corking cotton.

Q54 Right. So, the situation is, it would be corking cotton then the putty substance - - -

A Mm.

Q54 - - - over the top? What colour would the corking cotton be ordinarily?

A White.

Q55 White? If I was to tell you that the rabbit line, so to speak, on this occasion, was with the gap, which is about the thickness of a pen - - -

A Mm.

Q55 - - - it's been indicated to us that it could go in to about a pen size - - -

A O.K.

Q55 - - - and the background to that was black, would that indicate anything to you?

A Well, it could mean one of a few things.

Q56 Right.

A It could, could be staining from the hardwood.

Q57 Right.

A In the corking cotton.

Q58 Right.

A If it is corking cotton. It could be hemp, hemp, which is very dark in colour.

Q59 Right.

A But we hadn't put any hemp into that at all. Failing that it could have been the dark coloured ..... or .....

Q60 Right. So, if it's the case that it was part of the stem - - -

A Mm.

Q60 - - - would that mean that, technically speaking I suppose, that the plank wood just be put on to the stem?

A There's a gap left out purposely.

Q61 There was a gap left there?

A Mm.

Q62 Which would allow water to enter?

A No. Not .....

Q63 No, O.K. But would that mean that the, that area of the boat was watertight?

A It should be watertight, yeah.

Q64 O.K. And what would make it watertight, having the planks .....

A having the planks fitting in, in the surface behind it, you know, - - -

Q65 Right.

A - - - where it fastens on to the stem itself.

Q66 Right.

A But there, ... all the planks are ..... on the front edge, top and bottom edge - - -

Q67 O.K.

A - - - so the corking cotton will go into - - -

Q68 Right, O.K. O.K. Now, when the boat's constructed, what sort of finished is put on the planks and all that sort of thing?

A In this instance it's just paint.

Q69 Right.

A You know, a red lead in a lot of cases.

Q70 Right.

A Followed by a primer undercoat, just normal enamel paints.

Q71 O.K. Now, from your experience if the putty or the corking was missing from that, that area, what would be, or would there be any complications relating to that in the conditions of the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race, 1998, as we know the conditions were, in your opinion?

A In my opinion, no, because I was, I'm pretty satisfied in my own mind that the fasteners of the boat were

good.

Q72 Right.

A If fastenings had broken in the stem - - -

Q73 Yeah.

A - - - or the planking into the stem, it could have caused quite a major problem.

Q74 O.K. If one of the fastenings did in fact break, what would be the mechanics of that on the boat, so far as the plank coming loose or planks coming loose and how would that operate, would, would it, what, spring open? Or would it spring open slightly or -?

A Just a spring open a very small amount.

Q75 A very slightly.

A Yeah.

Q76 With the ingress of water that could in fact open it wider?

A Well - - -

Q77 Or cause more problems of water in the vessel rather than the plank?

A I mean, it could.

Q78 Yeah.

A Worst scenario, sure.

Q79 Yeah. Worst scenario. O.K. Now, in relation to the three or four planks which had evidence of cracking on the paint on those four planks only where the corking was missing, what would that indicate to you?

A Well, I'm not sure what you're saying with the corking missing, you see - - -

Q80 O.K. Well, O.K.

A It's - - -

Q81 Well, if I show you this - - -

A If there's putty missing, not a problem.

Q82 O.K.

A If there's corking missing - - -

Q83 O.K.

A - - - there is a problem.

Q84 Well, I'll show you this. Seeing we're unable to determine - - -

A Yeah.

Q84 - - - whether it's actually putty or corking missing - - -

A That's right.

Q84 - - - if I was to show you this diagram here - - -

A Yeah.

Q84 - - - which shows a rough sketch of the stem of the hull and the planks.

A .....

Q85 And you see that there's a gap here with what is indicated as missing corking.

A M'mm.

Q86 O.K. Now, on these planks here there is paint cracking, but not the other planks.

A Yeah.

Q87 O.K.

A Yeah.

Q88 What would that indicate [redacted]

Just on those planks.

A Just on those planks?

Q89 Mm.

A Movement of, movement of, of the timber.

Q90 Right.

A I would doubt in my experience that they were ..... at all.

Q91 Right.

A But there's a lot of cracks in the paint ..... all over that boat.

Q92 Right. O.K.

A All over it.

Q93 Right. O.K. That's fine.

Q94 And I mean it's a pretty common thing for putty to fall out.

Q95 Yeah.

A Especially above water line.

Q96 Yeah.

A As soon as your old putty's, dries out, it gets drier and drier and drier and it gets hard just like glazing putty.

Q97 Right.

A You know what I mean?

Q98 Yeah. Now, I believe that the, the Churchill was re-rigged at some stage.

A Yeah. It was re-rigged when we had a major overhaul in - - -

Q99 Three years ago?

A - - - two years ago.

Q100 Two years ago? All right.

A Yeah.

Q101 And did you, did you do that rigging, supervise it, or -?

A No. No.

Q102 O.K.

A No. No. I was part, partly involved in it.

Q103 Right.

A But I didn't make any decisions about it.

Q104 Right. That's fine.

A .....

Q105 Can you tell me how it was re-rigged, or what alterations were made?

A Well, there was, the old mast was taken out with all the rigging.

Q106 Yeah.

A A new mast was put in, an aluminium mast. It was about eight or nine feel taller, I think. Much lighter in weight.

Q107 Yeah.

A The mast, and the boom was much, much lighter in weight.

Q108 Yeah.

A And slightly more sail area.

Q109 O.K.

A And - - -

Q110 Yeah. Sorry.

A ..... and the, the ..... had been, were reinforced.

Q111 Right.

A I would, I would ..... made better than what they were.

Q112 Right.

A So, it didn't look very flash on the boat and the back ..... fitting was refastened.

Q113 Right.

A .....

Q114 O.K. Now, from what I know about old boats, I assume that when the Winston Churchill was first built, it was built to the standards of a, of a cotton sail.

A Sure.

Q115 Considering its rig. Now, would you be able to, from your experience, give me some ideas as, as to how, or, if any, affects there could be on a boat of the Winston's vintage and new rigging and a stiffer sail?

A In theory and most probably in practise, the, the boat had, had had modernised sails, as in dacron sails and - - -

Q116 Yeah.

A - - - stainless steel rigging and all that prior to Richard buying it.

Q117 Yeah.

A With the newer riggings it had a very similar rigging.

Q118 Yeah.

A Even though it was bigger, the sails were as much,

well, they weren't much different than, than the old sails, just that they were new. They weren't anything, they're no special sort of cloths that were made ..... which some of the race boats have got in them. And I purposely put ropes on it that were, still had a fair bit of stretch in them.

Q119 Right.

A Not like on, ... modern day ropes ..... that are rock hard, they're as hard as rod or wire, purposely - - -

Q120 Yeah.

A - - - to, to look after the boat.

Q121 All right.

A You know, I sort of insisted on that throughout the whole thing, 'cause .....

Q122 Can you explain that a bit further, I mean - - -

A Well ..... - - -

Q123 Why is that, what's the potential there, like why do that?

A Well, in the old days they were built, as you said earlier, with cotton sails, cotton ropes, everything had a lot of give in it.

Q124 Right.

A And it, when the pressures got too great, the sails would stretch or bow out - - -

Q125 Yeah.

A - - - and it was technology too.

Q126 Yeah.

A But, I'd say for the last 20 years ..... on sails and it's got a new set of sails for it, so, that side of it really hadn't changed.

Q127 Yes.

A But, if we put new rope on it, new special rope on it that they use in all the race boats now, ... could have disintegrated - - -

Q128 How - - -

A - - - because it's got no stretch in it.

Q129 Right.

A You know, when waves hit it and - - -

Q130 Yeah.

A - - - wind hits it - - -

Q131 Yeah.

A - - - there's just no give in anything. So, we made sure we put the old, older style ropes on - - -

Q132 Yeah.

A - - - to make sure that it had give in it.

Q133 What would be the mechanics of, of it falling apart if it had stiff ropes on it? I mean, how would it ..... or would it fall apart? I mean I'm only getting you sort of to - - -

A Yeah. No .....

Q134 ..... fold up?

A Well, it could just - - -

Q135 Would it crack, crack like - - -

A - - - it, it would mainly break the fittings that they're attached to - - -

Q136 Right.

A - - - like genoa blocks, ... blocks - - -

Q137 Right.

A It'll find the weakest point, which is - - -

Q138 Yeah.

A - - - fastenings around those areas, 'cause there's point loading on those areas.

Q139 Yeah. O.K. Dave?

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q140 When the, when the new rigging was put in and all the new stain, was it, you said earlier that there were stainless steel shrouds - - -

A Yeah. Yeah.

Q140 - - - and backstays, that would also increase the pressures on the boat, wouldn't it?

A Well, the stays that were taken out were all stainless steel. The only thing that I think that would increase pressure is the extra sail area in reality.

Q141 Which, that's in fact what happened though, wasn't it? It was new sails were put on with increased sail area - - -

A Yeah.

Q141 - - - within the last two years.

A They were put on for the Hobart before.

Q142 O.K. So - - -

A Because I went down there.

Q143 Right. So, that was, that was 12 months ago.

A Yeah.

Q144 Or, prior to the 1998 race?

A Yeah.

Q145 And you were sailing on board that particular time, did you in fact see any problems associated with increased sail area at the time?

A No.

Q146 Right. And the conditions were obviously a lot less than the 1998 race?

A Sure. Mm.

Q147 With all these ..... that you, when the new rig was put on, were they all increased or were they checked?

A The whole, whole boat was checked structurally.

Q148 Yeah. Yeah.

A And I was it, it was anticipated to, I, I don't know who came up with the suggestion of a bigger rig, but obviously the owner or I think they got a yacht designer involved in it too ..... and they decided ..... performance. The characteristics of the boat were that we're, we were quite surprised that we had to reef the boat quite early in the piece. I mean we put reefs on it going to Hobart the year before, we thought as an older boat it would have been a bit stiffer, so to speak. ..... characteristic of the boat.

Q149 .....

A ..... boat. But I don't think it had any detrimental effect on the boat. I mean it would have

if it had these ..... kevlar ropes on it, I'm sure of that.

Q150 M'mm. With what we've been told and the, with the bow section as we were talking about before, and further information that we've been told, at the time the vessel was sinking that it appeared as though planks were being pulled from the sides downwards, or they were being pulled out, planks were being pulled from the deck and also from the, from the gunnels down probably three or four planks under heavy sea conditions. What would that suggest to you?

A Well, depends on which side of the boat it was and which tack the boat was on, I, I believe the boat was on starboard tack which would put the port side in the water - - -

Q151 Yes.

A - - - and I believe that the leeward bulwarks, when the boat came the other way and broke off which, in my mind I can quite easily see that happening, because there was not much support ..... the bulwarks are above the deck.

Q152 Yeah.

A ..... 10, 11 inches above the deck. And I had, what they call ..... frames, which are an extension from the ribs, and the frames coming up through the deck, and they were broken off in turn would have really upset the deck beams and deck shelf. And there was some minor fastenings ..... just to

hold it in line in that area and I think, myself, I think some of the topside planks, port side midships have broken and given way as the rest of these frames and stuff have broken off.

Q153 Mm.

A That's what I think's happened to it.

Q154 And that would be through, in more layman's terms, through pressures of the waves pushing down on the bulwarks?

A Yeah. On the leeward side.

Q155 And the boat being, on the leeward side.

A Yeah. Either the boat being thrown very hard sideways, which has happened in this case, or, you know, something hitting it on the leeward side, which wouldn't have happened. Well, apart from water.

Q156 Right.

A It wouldn't have happened.

Q157 Mm.

A I can't, I mean, the boat's very strong fore and aft and aft, I can't see it exploding in a stem or down the keel, anywhere like that.

Q158 Mm.

A Honestly, I can't, can't visualise that happening.

Q159 M'mm. What was the keel construction of the boat?

A Well, it's a full length keel.

Q160 Right.

A Made out of hardwood, which is most probably eight by, 8 inches by 8 inches square.

Q161 Right.

A Plus more hardwood bolted onto it or ..... but massive timbers in the boat.

Q162 Yeah.

A Like, a lot of wood in it.

Q163 Yeah.

A And all very well tied together.

Q164 Yeah.

A You know, the boat is, it's stand, it stood a couple of beachings before. I can't remember what years, ... 60s or something like that, and apparently only plank ..... was damaged then.

Q165 You mentioned earlier about the flooring where the mast was stepped. Can you give us an indication on the, on the normal strength of that and the condition of that area?

A Well, that, the mast step's a bit of timber running fore and aft, I'd say it'd be about nine by, nine by four, nine by three or four inches and it's spanned over three big hardwood floor members, which they're notched over the, the keel itself, the backbone of the boat, which is attached to all the planking and the frames, what have you, and when I surveyed the boat originally, when I had a look at it after I've come back from my holidays, after they done this work on it, it was still as good as you'd expect from a boat ..... it didn't need, didn't need any work doing on it.

Q166 Well, that was indicated to you by, you know, the, your thoughts on the strength of the boat and they way she was built?

A Yeah. Yeah. Well, we had to pull fastenings out of the boat to see what condition they were in and it gives it - - -

Q167 M'mm.

A - - - you know, you do it at random all over the boat, it gives you a good idea of, of what's wrong, but you don't pull big bolts out of - - -

Q168 Mm.

A - - - out of boats like that, 'cause you just can't get them through the hardwood.

Q169 Mm. So, after you surveyed it, was there any problems that, with the boat that you're, you were aware of?

A No.

Q170 Or anything that was brought to your attention - - -

A Nothing structurally.

Q171 Nothing structural?

A Yeah. No, we, we, as I said, we weren't happy with the, with the decks because that was more of a - - -

Q172 Yeah.

A - - - lot of cosmetic nuisance sort of thing, getting the upholstery wet, for the owner and wetting his instruments and stuff.

Q173 Yeah.

A No, structurally, no.

Q174 O.K. Now, if I could just clarify one thing in

relation to the corking and the cotton. The construction would be in the stem, it would be, a stem, cotton, then a corking compound over that?

A There's a, there's a corking putty a linseed oil putty - - -

Q175 Right.

A - - - put over the coking cotton.

Q176 Right. O.K.

A The corking cotton is there to stop the leak.

Q177 Right.

A The putty is purely cosmetic.

Q178 Cosmetic.

A Yeah.

Q179 O.K. If they putty is gone, and the cotton is gone, is there a gap?

A In theory, in good practise, no, there's not a gap.

Q180 Right. O.K.

A Because the planks are bevelled - - -

Q181 Yes.

A - - - to take the cotton - - -

Q182 Right.

A - - - you know, the planks are fitted first - - -

Q183 Yeah.

A - - - so they all fit perfectly - - -

Q184 Yeah.

A Then they bevel them to put the cotton in.

Q185 Yes.

A Then they put the, the, the putty over the top of the

cotton.

Q186 Right. O.K.

A So, it's all nice and smooth.

Q187 Right. And providing that this was the case in the Winston, there shouldn't have been an ingress of water if those two compounds had, were gone?

A If the cotton had gone, yes.

Q188 The cotton - - -

A It can.

Q189 It can, O.K.

A Yeah.

Q190 It's a possibility?

A Yeah.

Q191 O.K. Do you know if there are any plans available for the Winston Churchill, accurate plans?

A I doubt if there were ever - - -

Q192 O.K.

A - - - any made.

Q193 Right. O.K.

A .....

Q194 Are you aware of the original builder?

A Percy ....., I never met him, but he's built a lot of boats.

Q195 Right. Percy -?

A .....

Q196 Are you aware if he's still -?

A No. He's gone, long gone.

Q197 Is he, O.K.

A He, he, he, he built it for himself.

Q198 Righteo.

A In Tasmania.

Q199 O.K.

A He's got quite few other boats that are still around.

Q200 Wooden boats?

A Yeah. Yeah. He was an old guy then.

Q201 All right. O.K. Dave?

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

No, I've nothing further.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q202 Anything further you'd like to say?

A No.

Q203 O.K. The time by my watch now is 2.58pm, this interview is concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED