Uncovering Carrington

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Abstract
The first part of this chapter examines Carrington's place within Newcastle, its separation from the rest of the city, its reputation, and its internal differentiation. The second part of this chapter considers the collective memory of Carrington as a stigmatised and dangerous industrial and maritime space with its own internal social and spatial divisions.

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Uncovering Carrington

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UNCOVERING PLACES AND COMMUNITY

urban researchers interested in expressions of community and place are faced with the perennial problem of uncovering the identity of cities. The search for identity requires looking beyond the obvious landscape inscriptions to an examination of the city as it is lived. Observers may recognize Paris from an image of the Eiffel Tower or Sydney from a picture-postcard of the Opera House, but such architectural icons tell us little about the lived city. In Carlo Levi’s Invisible Cities, Marco Polo tells Kubilai Khan that the city of Zaira can not simply be read using the obvious aspects of the city's physical morphology. Zaira, he argued, must be described with studied reference to its past. The reading required for such description must involve the landscapes and the people who are too often overlooked, but not important, or 'insignificant'.

The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the g stirrings, the banister of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrawls.

In order to engage with the lived city, the depictions of place found in creative and official literature need to be supplemented with the ‘everyday’ articulations of local community and places. The lives of a city are often etched on the landscape and found in the words of residents in ways which are informal, unrecorded and unofficial. The digging and sorting through documentary and ethnographic material discloses a sense of identity and community. Such a dislocation may, however, result in an identity which is narrowly defined by the resources available. Places and communities may be artificially constrained to a unitary identity which is limiting and inflexible in coping with internal heterogeneity. The story of Carrington from the unofficial sources used here, although providing a sense of place and community, is itself a partial construction. Although it reveals hidden histories, it may further mask other others. Places and people who fail outside that new unitary determination of identity become, or remain, hidden. As the editors of this book have claimed, the urban researcher must attempt to ‘uncover hidden, misunderstood, or merely forgotten fragments’. In this way more progressive and inclusive articulations of place identity are made possible. Forgotten people and landscapes are unearthed, valorised, and perhaps incorporated. Lost fragments are assimilated, in what becomes a constant process of urban redefinition. However, in discovering hidden histories of place, it is essential to be constantly aware of their partial nature and of the aspects which have remained hidden or, indeed, may have been hidden by the processes and sources used by the urban researcher.

UNCOVERING NEWCASTLE/COVERING CARRINGTON

The public re-definition of Newcastle has been in many ways a laudable project of community assertiveness. It has been a largely defensive agenda, aimed at correcting a set of negative imagery associated with the industrial city, with its attendant pollution, decline and problematic industrial relations. The 'best city' identity which was chosen to replace these negatives was a package of post-industrial images.

The city's decisions-making elite initially decided to represent Newcastle through images of consumption-based activities, and emphasised the beach, the vineyards, and commercial waterfront redevelopments. The people presented were white, middle class, heterosexual Australians. They were white-collar consumers of Hunter Valley wine and fine seafood. Blue-collar workers were not. The working class and their spaces, which figured so prominently in the earlier identities of Newcastle, were being 'written out' of the city's public presentations. Omission from local identity construction was part of the elimination from local citizenship. The new post-industrial middle class representation of Newcastle, even more than the old, appears to dispossess the people of Carrington of their identity and hides their spaces. The people of Carrington, formerly hidden among the post-industrial clones and the smokeshed of the industrial diaspora, are in the 1990s more deliberately concealed behind a generalised facade defining their own identity through collective memory of a community based on maritime and industrial work. The space nonetheless becoming visible in the streetscape and discourse of the city.

'Carrington's renaissance' screamed a major feature headline in the Newcastle Herald in 1994. It is rebirth is indeed an emergence, an uncovering of one of Newcastle's hidden spaces. It was this contest of changing communities in an era of profound industrial and image restructuring which initially precipitated the wider project of which this work forms a part.

The residents of Carrington and the suburb itself, have long occupied a hidden space within Newcastle. In the creative literature about Newcastle the suburb is described by one of the dominant industrial icons of Newcastle: the BHP smokeshed, the abandoned State Dockyard, the wheat silos. Seeing the whole city spread out below him, he was filled with a sense of exultation: the harbour sparkling between the winding shores of the estuary, ... the twin arms of Nobbys and Stockton enclosing it like the pinions of a giant crab, the hulks of buildings along the water-front; the scatter of suburbs ... the immovable factory chimneys .... His gaze wandered over the harbour, from where the enormous stacks of Southern Steel and B.H.P. rose from the flat furnaces, belching forth smoke and steams in silver-
Uncovering Carrington

uncovering of Carrington has hidden other spaces and people. Some of these are revealed below, such as the north-south divide of Carrington where the north, with its tin shanties, is colloquially referred to as ‘Texan’. Other divisions within the workshops caused by social hierarchy and gender are hinted at if not made explicit.

This chapter focuses on two main themes, one being Carrington’s place within the city, the other being its self-definition as an industrial and maritime suburb. In re-creating this history of Carrington as a place apart, as a self-defined industrial suburb, we are using predominantly the oral histories of local residents carried out in 1995, as well as a video of the Carrington community made in 1996 where residents also speak. ³ We also use as context some of the creative/ fictitious literature which focuses on Newcastle more generally. We recognize, however, that in re-incribing the space of Carrington, we are ourselves leaving out of the picture some of the groups most often marginalised in Australian society: the poor, working women, children, as well as the indigenous and foreign-born population. The oral histories of long-standing residents are themselves only partial in the telling of a community of generations, which to some extent excludes the transients, the seamen and the foreigners, who, like the ballast from foreign shores, were perceived as different from the residents but nevertheless contributed significantly to its identity. This picture of Carrington is therefore not intended as definitive but rather as one story amongst many.

A PLACE APART

The first part of this chapter examines Carrington’s place within Newcastle, its separation from the rest of the city, its reputation, and its internal differentiation. Despite the fact that Carrington was often represented as a nameless, undistinguished part of the ‘flats’ and industrial landscapes of the inner city, historically it was nevertheless a place with a distinct identity. This identity is expressed in the ‘island mentality’ of Carrington residents, in their understanding of their suburb as a unique location that is ‘a place apart’ from other parts of Newcastle, and in their sense of what it means to be a Carrington person.

Carrington is a peninsula jutting into Newcastle harbour, at the heart of the city and in the midst of its industrial core. The major access routes are across a bridge from the wharf-side, that leads only to Carrington. The bridge is a symbolic entity and exit point to and from the suburb. Local people regularly refer to ‘outsiders’ and speak of the peninsular suburb as an ‘island’ with strongly identified boundaries between their place and the rest of the city.

The ‘island’ was, for many, the boundary within which their daily lives were lived, it was their home, their workplace, the place where they socialised. Many recollect only rarely venturing off Carrington, and then on well remembered outings for special events.

Interviewer: Did your mum go off Carrington for anything?
Resident: Not a thing.
Interviewer: She stayed on Carrington? What about your dad?
Resident: The only place he went was into town to work ...
Interviewer: What else do you remember as a kid going off Carrington for anything — other than, like we’ve said the beach, and dancing classes?
Resident: No, not really, only for different, if you had relatives off you want to visit them, but we used to go to picnics.
Interviewer: Did you go off Carrington for very much? Other than to go to the beach?
Resident: No, that was the only time we went off the island at all.

Some of this insularity was born of the fact that this was an industrial community where people lived close to their place of work in the many industries located around Newcastle harbour. In this working-class community, an overwhelming recollection was that past times were hard times when the community ‘did it hard’ and when few families would have been able to afford leisure trips off the island.

The boundaries around Carrington were not simply a result of its physical isolation ‘across the bridge’ nor of the insularity of the community. They were also defined by external views of the suburb, just as Carrington people viewed their place as a place apart from the rest of Newcastle so did ‘outsiders’. It was a place to which they almost never ventured.

Interviewer: It’s a separate entity to the rest of Newcastle. If people want to come to the island, they have to make a special trip over here. You don’t just drive through Carrington.
Resident: I was at the barrow when someone was talking the other week. The chap said: “When I was young, you wouldn’t put your foot over the bridge in Carrington.”
Resident: But on Carrington, you just never thought about it, you just, like I went to Citi’s High. There were only three of us out of my class went to the Citi’s High, the rest went to Wickham. And when I said: “I come from Carrington”, it was: “Oh, Carrington!” As if you come from another planet, because there used to be so many that wouldn’t cross the bridge. I don’t know what they thought they thought we were going to do to them.

The final quotation listed above shows the effect not only of physical isolation but of social stigma. The distinct and unflattering social identity that was generated for the suburb among other Newcastle residents no doubt contributed to their reluctance to go on to Carrington. It was a suburb viewed as dirty, polluted and rough, its reputation was enough to keep others away.

Resident: People’d say “Carrington, oh yuck”...
Resident: Well it was Carrington, it was very bad, because Carrington had a bad name. Give a dog a bad name and it sticks.
Resident: A lot of them still think Carrington is a dirty place, you know, full of dust and everything else. It had a reputation if there was football on that we would drive them off the beach ... and there was a reputation of, or, sort of thuggery, when it wasn’t. And it’s still got that. People still call their name up when you say Carrington but now they come over and have a look.

The stigma attached to the place and the people was thought to make Carrington a dumping ground where unwanted urban facilities could be located. Facilities such as hostels for groups in need may be more easily relocated to areas such as is noted, than to more expensive suburbs elsewhere. ⁶ The use of Carrington as a dumping ground was mentioned by several residents.

Resident: I think it got to the stage where it felt as if no one else wanted to push them [hostels, schools etc] over the bridge, then Carrington would put up with it, and we’d accept it.
Resident: If they don’t — can’t — put them anywhere else, they dump them on Carrington.
Resident: And they use Carrington, they think they can get a foot in here, because it’s a working class area they can get away with it ...

The accumulation of welfare services, hostels and their associated service-dependent populations did nothing to enhance Carrington’s reputation among (disparaging) ‘outsiders’. More revealing, Carrington was also a place perceived as threatening and even dangerous. Its industrial and maritime history made it a place that threatened both physical danger and social, even moral, disorders. Carrington people were eager to disassociate themselves as residents from the street-fighting, drinking and generally violent character that was part of the suburb’s maritime identity.

Resident: A lot of trouble was on Carrington was from strangers, not actually Carrington people. See what happened here, a lot of ships would come here ... They were some Liverpool Irishmen and that and they used to get out ... and have fights ... Then Carrington got a bad name.
Resident: It was a seaman’s, um, community or team or whatever, you know. And you had a pub on every corner. That’s what it was, Carrington.
Resident: Sin city, as they call it ... Oh I think in the early days there was a lot of erotic things might have gone on with the seamen ..., we didn’t contribute towards the Sin city part of it.

Indeed, Carrington people are often described as having unique qualities born of their common house and histories. For many Carrington ‘insiders’, the stigma of being from Carrington — a place apart — was balanced by the comfort and generosity of its ‘people apart’.

Resident: I remember a lot of times, meeting a lot of outsiders, a couple of people have said "Carrington!", I’ve said "don’t worry about it, they are better than you will find anywhere else".
Resident: If you get burnt out you could guarantee a fortnight later you’d have all your money back and it’s only through the people on the island doing it to help you.
Resident: It’s unique. It gets into your heart. It gets into your being ... You feel that you’re proud to live here.

So on the one hand, Carrington was a hidden, nameless place amidst the greater mass of the city’s industrial icons and the major icons of the prosperous Victorian era. Yet on the other hand, it was simultaneously a suburb unlike other suburbs, physically isolated and clearly bounded, perceived as an island, and set apart socially from the more ‘respectable’ suburbs of the greater Newcastle area. One resident, whose father had been a coal trimmer, commented that her daughter and grand-

Plate 12.2 Carrington Bridge. Photograph by JO GALBREATH

Newcastle: The Hidden City
daughter now lived in one of Newcastle's most prestigious suburbs, Merewether Heights. She had an ironic view of that suburb's 'picturesque' charms, reflecting that 'you don't have to scratch far before you reach the coal dust.' The recognition that Carrington was 'a place apart' therefore operated from both within and outside the suburb and was played out in the lived experience of the city at a number of different levels.

**INTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION**

Any representation of Carrington as internally homogeneous, although a 'place apart' from other suburbs, is entirely misleading. In presenting a view of Carrington as 'a place apart', there is a risk of covering up the internal differentiations in the suburb and of presenting an entirely unitary view of Carrington's history which masks the multi-faceted complexity of its lived reality. Within Carrington there were boundaries that existed in the lived spaces of its residents. Though invisible, in the sense that they did not take a physical form, these boundaries were social divides which were (inevitably) in shaping the lives and social patterns of residents. Though barely two kilometres in length from its southern to its northern tip, Carrington was divided into a northern and a southern end. The northern end was 'Texas' or 'the top end'. Residents recollected 'Texas' as a place where people were poor, and lived in simple, small cottages and tin shanties with few facilities. Residents 'called that part — what was called Crown and that was called Texas and they was all little cottages ... Residents: Up there, there was no light, there was no running water and there was no sanitary — no toilets ... Residents: This was an unhappy sort of settlement ... Residents: Other people might not have thought they were very much, but what they had, they owned or they were buying. The boundary between 'Texas' and the rest of Carrington was clear cut and in the eyes of the residents was a determining influence on their patterns of social interaction.

- Resident: There was a top and a bottom then. [She] was born in the bottom end of Carrington. I was born in the top end. The line was at the school then. One was the bottom and one was the top. Interviewer: But that didn't mean very much did it? Resident: It used to mean a lot in those days? Interviewer: What did it mean? Resident: Well, that you was born in that end (points) you stayed that end. We were born this end (points) we stayed this end. You don't come across the line or Lord knows what will happen to you, particularly if there was a woman in it. Resident: Because we lived up the top there, ... down the bottom end and, that was it, there was a line in the middle. Resident: ... at 'Texas' was like another country ... another race or something. The one thing that did draw people from the bottom end into 'Texas' was sporting activities. Here was open space used especially for cycling, cricket and football. However, trips to the cycling velodrome or to the oval are spoken of as visits to another place.

- Resident: On the top of Bourke Street there was a bicycle velodrome, and there was also an oval or football oval, behind that. That's back this way. 'Texas' went straight up Scott Street, you went into 'Texas', where the houses were ... Interviewer: My grandfather used to come over ... Resident: I had uncle riding there ... Interviewer (to himself a Carrington resident): I think my grandfather used to come to Carrington to ride ... The separations of spaces within this bounded 'place apart' is revealed further in the memories of Carrington as an industrial and maritime suburb.

**COLLECTIVE MEMORY: INDUSTRIAL AND MARITIME CARRINGTON**

The second part of this chapter considers the collective memory of Carrington as a stigmatised and dangerous industrial and maritime space with its own internal social and spatial divisions. Carrington, because of its harbourside location under the shadow of the industrialworks, we have argued, has been seen as an anomalous part of the flat featureous fromores. The scatter of suburbs occupying the industrial spaces between the urban, Victorian and industrial icons of the city. However, the name of Carrington carried overtones as a dangerous but isolated space: 'across the bridge' anything might happen, with drunken scenes fighting and manslaughter down the streets. As such, the space was marginalised within the city, painted with the perceived character of its inhabitants from the dangerous labouring classes. Its identity as an industrial suburb, albeit of a particularly dangerous sort, forms part of the wider hegemonic view of Newcastle as an industrial city, the city of "rust and coal" portrayed by Nieuwland.
The separation of male and female spaces is predicated on a very deeply-rooted structural division between men and women, with men categorized as the breadwinners and women cast into the reproductive and supportive roles. Residents: I was in the marching girls band... for us to go away we depended on the men that worked on the wharves; the coal trimmers, the pin boxes and the sawyers... They used to sit on the corner. That was their place of congregation. In all the old times that were there they were there to stay. The comment above and the following portray working women and girls both dependent upon and servicing the needs of the community.

Residents: The kids used to come and have to go home from school at lunchtime and have to take their fathers', the coal trimmers and the sawyers, lunches down to the ships. They had to go home at lunchtime, pick up the plate, tied up in a bit-tied and carry it.

Residents: It was a better world. I think. Dad brought home the bacon and Mum stayed home and cooked it.

CARRINGTON UNCOVERED

This chapter has uncovered some of the hidden spaces and multiple layers within Carrington. Carrington has been revealed within the definitions of the new post-industrial clean green city identity. The sources used here reveal an identity as a place both to be avoided and used, a place apart from the rest of Newcastle, dangerous and pathologised, a place no one else would visit. In the city, the space was historically by no means homogenous but was internally differentiated by status, between ‘Texas’ and the rest, between the Pin Boxes and the coal trimmers by gender, between home and workplace.

The view of Carrington presented here, drawn essentially from voices of long-standing residents, tells us many stories of Carrington. In uncovering this identity, we present an almost unitary picture of the city that encompasses its diverse layers.

The history of the city is one that has to a great extent been adapted by the local residents. This is clearly seen in the banner from the 1990 Carrington Fair which depicts the island and the bridge, signifying ‘a place apart’, and a community identity built on a maritime and industrial past. The recent street improvement program has also resulted in the adoption of maritime icons in the landscape, ranging from bus shelters to litter bins. These local icons identify Carrington as a particular place within the city although the pervasive overtones of a pathologised and policed of the flag. Carrington is no longer hidden in Coskell’s “huddle of buildings” and “scatter of suburbs”, but at last industries will go and Carrington will become “part of the city”.

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*Plate 1.2.3 Carrington Fair Banner, Photographed by Pauline McCullagh*