

The Past in the Present

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*The past is not dead. It is not even past.*¹

*In an era when relationships with loyalty and community appear to be fragmenting, it seems essential to think in very broad ways about issues of rootedness and belonging: the ethical dilemmas, personal and collective, which must be resolved before a rightful place in the world can be assumed.*²

In 2002 I was commissioned by the Blue Mountains City Council to produce a public artwork, etched into the granite pavement of *Carrington Place*, the town square for Katoomba in the Blue Mountains. My brief for the *Carrington Place* required me to work in collaboration with a local indigenous artist of my choice. I chose to work with Jacinta Tobin, an indigenous singer/songwriter, to develop the text. The collaboration between Jacinta Tobin and me allowed us to gather stories from Dharug and Gundungurra people living in Katoomba.

The artwork for the *Carrington Place* introduces a sense of discovery, a layering of history, poetic associations and a sensitivity to place. The name Katoomba is derived from a Gundungurra word “Kedumba”, signifying a *place of tumbling waters*.³ Therefore it was decided that water would be the overall conceptual theme linking other concepts contained within the artwork. *Carrington Place* is situated in front of the Carrington Hotel at the top of the main street. This is the highest point of the town. Two types of granite were used in the over-all design, these created patterns that represented the flow of water.

The stories referred to within the artwork were deliberately chosen to represent the lives of ‘ordinary’ people (by that I mean people who do not hold positions of power). And in some cases people who have experienced hardship, injustice and displacement. This was a way of “giving a voice” to people that may have otherwise remained unheard. While these people are no longer alive, their descendants live in and around the town of Katoomba and their stories are kept alive through the *Carrington Place* artwork.⁴

¹ William Faulkner

² M Thomas. *The Artificial Horizon: Imagining the Blue Mountains*, Melbourne University Press, 2003, p. 13.

³ J Low, *Pictorial Memories Blue Mountains*, Atrand, Crows Nest, Sydney, 1994, p.70.

⁴ Some of the stories were told to Jacinta Tobin and me by two important Aboriginal women who had lived in the Gully as children, Dawn Colless and Joan Cooper (they are affectionately known in the Blue Mountains community as Aunty Dawn and Aunty Joan). I feel it has been a privilege to have known these women and to hear their stories. Aunty Dawn and Aunty Joan have both been recognised as having made a significant contribution to the Blue Mountains community. Two bridges, built between 2004 and 2006, spanning the Great Western Highway in Katoomba and Leura are named after Aunty Dawn Colless and Aunty Joan Cooper OAM. In my opinion the bridge is a fitting symbol for the lives of these women who contributed so much to the Blue Mountains community and assisted in bridging the racial divide. Aunty Dawn Colless died soon after the opening of the *Carrington Place* in 2003. Aunty Joan Cooper died in 2006.

Jacinta Tobin and I aimed to acknowledge prior ownership of the land and to show respect for aboriginal traditions. The non-linear approach meant that we were not confined to a narrative or to maintaining chronological order. This also allowed us to take into account different perspectives. We aimed to present a particular period of history through words, phrases and the names of people who were present in the early 20th century.

The text meanders across the pavement, poetically referring to fragments of stories. Some of the stories in the artwork reflect the lesser-known histories of people who lived in 'The Gully' in the early part of the 20th century and their relationship to the Carrington Hotel as workers. 'The Gully' is a unique place in Katoomba where aboriginal and non-aboriginal people lived side-by-side until they were forcibly evicted in 1957 to make way for a racing car track. Today the racing car track is no longer in use and much of the bush that was cleared in 1957 has regenerated. In 2002 'The Gully' was declared the "Upper Kedumba Aboriginal Place" due to its significance to local Aboriginal people.

The story of the Gully is recorded by historian, Martin Thomas, in his book "The Artificial Horizon", detailing the brutal form of racism at an institutional level. Thomas is aware of the potential power imbalance of the white male researcher recording Aboriginal narratives and his subjects. However it is evident from his telling of the stories of the Gully that Thomas has taken a sensitive approach that has allowed Aboriginal people to feel at ease to share their stories.⁵

The themes presented in the *Carrington Place* artwork can be divided into three categories: the natural environment, the built environment and indigenous stories. This chapter presents the text that is etched into the artwork and the research that underpins the text and images. The designs are embedded into the etched granite pavement of the town square, not separate, nor separable from the place itself.

⁵ M Thomas. 2003.

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Kedumba

The flow of water forms the place, a story etched in time

Connecting people and place

One water for all whispering water earth song survival

Words incorporated into the water designs allude to the importance of water for the environment and for the spirit. They refer to the role that water has played in forming the mountains geographically. *Carrington Place* is intended as a meeting place for all cultures. The direction of the words allows them to be read as people enter the site from the street. The words and their meanings are not necessarily intended to be immediately obvious. As people spend time at *Carrington Place* they can discover the words within the designs and reflect upon the layers of meanings.

The *Eucalyptus Oreades*, commonly known as the Mountain Ash, is an iconic tree especially for the upper mountains. The artwork for the landing at the top of the stairs and the southern entrance references photographs taken at Katoomba Creek of the *Oreades* reflected in the water. Other plant designs in the artwork refer to some introduced species planted in the 1890's & 1920's for the Carrington Hotel. These include the *Magnolia Grandiflora*, the Bunya pines and the New Zealand Cabbage tree.⁷

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Katoomba has a colourful history. It is recognised that the growth of the town in the early part of the 20th Century was directly attributable to The Carrington Hotel. The inclusion of the iron lacework etched into the pavement at the Carrington Hotel end of the site, as a shadow fragmenting into water, alludes to the history of the Carrington Hotel, creating a link between the hotel and the *Carrington Place*. The iron lacework was removed in 1912 to make way for the Art Nouveau style. The design for the ironwork was registered in New South Wales in 1883 by A. T. Rees & Co.⁸

The name Samuel Timmings appears hidden in the leaf designs within the pavement. He was the gardener for the Carrington Hotel between from 1914 till 1947. Harry Kelly was an architect

⁶ The text written in this font refers to the text that is actually etched into the granite artwork.

⁷ P Innes, Personal interview, 11 October 2002.

⁸E G Robertson, *Decorative Cast Iron in Australia*, Currey O'Neil, Melbourne, 1984 pp. 14-15.

who designed features for the Carrington garden in 1923-25. Kelly was responsible for the design of many of the buildings that still exist at the 'top end' of Katoomba Street today. Despite his significant influence in Katoomba, today he remains virtually unknown. Harry Kelly's signature is etched into the pavement to be discovered and pondered by visitors and locals.⁹

Norah spies the Great White Fleet

a silver dollar and a kiss

Norah Goyder was the granddaughter of Frederick Goyder. He was the first Mayor of Katoomba and the proprietor of the Carrington hotel from 1886 till it was sold to Sir James Joynton Smith in 1911. Norah related this story to Paul Innes (historian for the Carrington Hotel) in 2000, the year before her death. Against her father's wishes, 7 year-old Norah absconded from school, skipped up Katoomba Street and peered through the doors of the Carrington Hotel dining room. There she spied American sailors. Afterwards, one of the sailors gave her a silver dollar and a kiss. This was Norah's memory of the visit from The Great White Fleet in 1908.¹⁰

Miss Mc Grail in the main house

keeping secrets

Evelyn McGrail worked as booking clerk at the Carrington Hotel for about 40 years. She went to her grave with knowledge that could divide Sydney society. Secrets and keys, they seem to go together. The key included in the design has a fascinating story that was also told to me by Paul Innes. On their honeymoon in July 1920, Mr. & Mrs. Rutherford stayed one night in the Carrington Hotel on their way to Queensland. When they left they accidentally took the key. Two weeks later they returned to the Carrington Hotel and asked to stay in the same room. They were told that the room was not available because the key was missing. They confessed to having the key and stayed in the room. When they left the second time they deliberately took the key as a memento. In 2002, the Rutherford's daughter, Marcia Johnson, decided it was time to return the key. The star design on the key ring was also the design on the old clock that was suspended over Katoomba Street.¹¹

INDIGENOUS STORIES

From the Gully to the Carrington

The following evocative phrases are written in the vernacular of 1920's Katoomba. It was our aim to write the phrases as if the people were still alive and active in Katoomba today.

Jacky's in the kitchen

star winger for the 'Blues'

he's always good for a song

⁹ P Innes, Personal interview, 11 October 2002.

¹⁰ P Innes. Personal interview 11 October 2002.

¹¹ *ibid.*

Walter Woodman Brooks, known to all as Jacky, was a great character in Katoomba's history. Born in about 1902 or 1903 he was a highly respected Aboriginal man who lived in the Gully and worked in the kitchen at the Carrington Hotel. Jacky played the organ for the little church in the Gully, he also played the comb and the gumleaf. He was a popular dance partner and an outstanding football player. Jacky played for the Blue Mountain's Regional Rugby League team, which was called the 'Blues'. At the age of 11 Jacky received a medal for rescuing two boys at Narrow Neck. Jacky was Aunty Dawn Colless's uncle. His mother was Rosie Brooks¹².

*Rosie in white lace gloves bringing wattle, gum tips and mosses
sugarbag shopping bag*

Rosie picked flowers from the Gully, which she sold to shops in Katoomba including the Carrington Hotel. Times were of course very different from today (no supermarkets, no plastic bags). People living in the Gully were poor. According to Aunty Dawn, Rosie always carried a sugarbag for a shopping bag and wore white lace gloves to town.¹³

Aunty May the little bird

Aunty May (Dawn's Aunty) actually worked for Balmoral House in Katoomba during the war, she was always referred to as 'the little bird'. This was included simply because it sounded beautiful.¹⁴

Eva's in the washhouse

Eva Agnes Webb was Aunty Joan Cooper's mother. She worked as the washerwoman for the Carrington Hotel.¹⁵

It was our intention to write the lines in a kind of recreation of history: referring to the daily life of the people who lived in Katoomba in the 1920's and 30's. I was particularly interested to make reference to the Gully as a reminder, not only of a shameful episode in Katoomba's history, but of a time and place where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people co-existed peacefully.

Many stories emerged during our research and there are many cultures associated with Katoomba. It was not possible to fully represent all cultures and in trying to do so crucial stories are bound to remain untold. However it was our intention to tell stories in a lyrical, non-linear way to create an artwork that allows for varying interpretations and a sense of discovery. This work demonstrates the anti-authoritarian approach and allows different points of view as opposed to the single authoritarian historical viewpoint.

¹² J Low, 1994, p.125.

¹³ D Colless, Personal interview, 10 October 2002.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ P Innes. Personal interview, 11 October 2002.