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AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

LECTURER

MARGARET HENRY

Oral History Project

TRANSCRIPT OF TAPED INTERVIEW

WITH

JOYCE BOND

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

OF

THE NEWCASTLE HILL RESIDENT'S GROUP

BY

JAN REYNOLDS

ON

3RD AUGUST 1988

August 3rd, 1988:

Interviewer: My name is Jan Reynolds and I'm talking to Joyce Bond at her home on the Hill in Newcastle. Joyce has been an active member of the Newcastle Hill Resident's Group since its inception in 1976. She is currently executive officer of a group that it is a force to be reckoned with in local social and environmental politics.

Interviewer: Joyce, perhaps you can tell us a bit about your years of growing up and education?

Joyce: I'm aged 71 and am of a family of five, two brothers and two sisters, and I was the youngest by twenty years and very indulged. And I was also rather lonely because it was like being an only child. My father died when I was six months old and my mother was very Victorian, Queen Victorian, not the State of, (laughter) and a devout Anglican and a believer in girl children staying home with mother and learning to be eventual good wives and mothers and perhaps because I was a lonely child I was a voracious reader.

I began school at an Anglican girl's grammar school and one of my earliest memories was of a first lesson in reading, when it was found to everyone's astonishment that I could already read. I've no idea how I knew, I'm fairly sure no family member instructed me so I must have taught myself by some strange means. Perhaps this is not unusual; I've never enquired if this is a common experience. I dreamed my way through school years and of course as was quite common in those days, I didn't consider, or it wasn't considered for me, a tertiary education. I wished later that I had had one.

I was ready for some independence and fun and I persuaded my family to let me leave home, but permission was only granted if I would live in a church hostel for girls. This hostel was in Kirribilli and became quite famous in later years as a sort of living anachronism (laughter). We had to sign a slate before going out at night and again sign stating the time we arrived back.

So then I got a job with a friend of the family, a stockbroker and he was very long suffering, but at least I did learn to type which has been a great advantage to me in my later years and in my present work.

I persuaded my mother to allow me to go overseas with some very good young women friends and this was not usual at that time. We stayed for a year in England and Scotland until the war broke out and left for home just before the Battle for Britain. I was so young and silly I would cheerfully have stayed without being of any use to anyone over there but my family was frantic and I came home via the Cape in a blacked-out ship, zig zagging all the way to avoid possible encounters with submarines.

...cont

I married within a year or so of reaching home. My husband was training as a pilot in the Air Force and as a consequence of course my marriage was certainly not what my mother had envisaged for me (laughter). As was my habit in those days I managed to enjoy life despite the awfulness of war time and I was lucky enough to be able to do some camp following of my husband in his various training stations until eventually I was well and truly anchored by the birth of our only child. And he has always been the light of my life.

I have been a very lucky and privileged person and so that could be one reason why I turned to be an activist in community affairs when I was no longer young. It has given me an opportunity to repay in a small way some of the advantages that I've had in my earlier life. I think on a personal note that's probably as much as I really feel I should say, or would like to say.

Interviewer: Do you think, Joyce, that when you were in Europe at the time of the threat of the Second World War, were you at all politically aware at that time, do you think you were really conscious of world affairs?

Joyce: Not in the very least. It was something I don't think any of us at the time, we were frightened and of course we naturally wanted the right outcome, but as for the politics of it, no, that didn't come into our ambit.

Interviewer: And after you married your husband, which was after the end of the war, wasn't it...?

Joyce: No, that was during the war.

Interviewer: When did you actually move to Newcastle?

Joyce: We came up here about 30 years ago. After the war he went back into practice as a lawyer, but he had already given up his practice in Sydney, so we had to think of some other ways of making a living and we went to the South Coast. We were there for about 9 years and then we decided to come to Newcastle because his brother was already here practising as an orthopaedic surgeon and very successfully, and we thought this would be a good place to make a change.

Interviewer: Did you get involved in any other committees, like through your son's schooling, before the Hill Resident's Group?

Joyce: No, that was my first essay into public affairs.

Interviewer: Perhaps you could tell me when the group formed and for what reason? Was it in response to a specific issue or just a general need of the community?

Joyce: Well, the genesis of the Hill Group I think came about this way. Through my friendship with an absolutely unforgettable and courageous woman, Jean Perret I became aware of the problems being experienced by residents of Newcastle East where Jean lived. Their whole inner city neighbourhood was threatened with demolition. This incidently is the area now that is regarded so highly as being an outdoor museum, and its very popular and very important to Newcastle. The Newcastle East people formed a resident's group and the story of the battle to save Newcastle East, I think will one day make as epic a story in urban history as the battle for the Rocks area in Sydney. It seemed to me 13 years ago that the Hill needed the protection of a properly constituted group to face possible similar threats to our community. So I approached half a dozen people that I judged would be sensitive to such problems and a steering committee was set up which called a Public Meeting which was attended by 73 people, and at that meeting the Hill group was born.

I've very warm memories of that meeting, you might be surprised to know that it was held in Christ Church Cathedral and it was chaired by the Dean of the Cathedral, the very Reverend Robert Beale, and I felt that this was a very auspicious beginning, even a blessed one (laughter).

Interviewer: From a more general aspect, what reasons, do you think usually inspires residents to form an action group?

Joyce: Well, resident's groups are mostly formed around a single issue as was the Newcastle East Resident's Group. For example, high rise development, an expressway through the community, industry intrusion into a residential area, something of that kind, and from the central issue comes an awareness of local problems generally and particularly the short-comings of the local council and also state departments and statutory authorities which can be very troublesome. In other words residents who originally took up the cudgell on a single issue often come to see the need to concern themselves in much wider questions of citizen participation.

Then the group becomes a forum for discussion of common problems and for the exchange of ideas, for working out proposals for legislative reform. It is also where tactics are devised to deal with uninformed, unsympathetic, insensitive or merely uncaring authorities. The Hill Group; my commitment to it grew stronger as time and events proved its need.

Interviewer: Do you find there is a lack of people, although there's plenty of support, is there a lack of people who actually prepared to do the administrative work?



- Joyce: I don't suppose that my group is any different from other organisations. I think this is always a problem. That you find that the work devolves on the few and the better you get at it ironically, the more that is going to continue.
- Interviewer: People tend to depend on the minority that have acquired the skills I suppose?
- Joyce: Yes, and they also feel that they couldn't do it as well. They don't realise that the people who do it well were amateurs themselves to begin with.
- Interviewer: Do you notice as far as male and female participation [goes] sort of an even spread or would you say there was more male or female?
- Joyce: Well women prevail, there's no doubt about that. But we do have quite a large proportion of men in the membership who thoroughly support everything we do, but they're not the workers as much as women are.
- Interviewer: Do you think, the women perhaps in general have more time, would that be why women are more involved, where the men probably have other commitments in employment and that sort of thing, would the women have more time available, that's why it falls to them?
- Joyce: Yes, I'm sure this is one of the prime causes. Because a lot of the work that you do has to be done during the day time, when they're involved in work, and a lot of the women who do a lot of the work in the groups, either don't work or they do the sort of work that allows them time to do other things.
- Interviewer: So how did you acquire the skills necessary to be so active in your group?
- Joyce: Just by trial and error, really. In the beginning I knew nothing, but I attended Council meetings, read the Council business papers, the Council agenda and the Council minutes, and it just comes about gradually.
- Interviewer: How do you find dealing with bureaucracy?
- Joyce: Well surprisingly, I find it quite easy. I'm not intimidated in any way.
- Interviewer: That's what I was wondering.
- Joyce: Yes, and I think if you aren't, you probably get better results. I don't know whether this is a good reflection on the bureaucracy or not, but I find them very helpful and I've never, I can't think of an instance where I've been refused either an interview or a conversation on the telephone. It's been really quite plain sailing in that regard.

- Interviewer: And I suppose with those sort of channels of communication open and that sort of cooperation, the Councillors must therefore respect the group and its role?
- Joyce: I like to think so. They probably do. Not to say that they wouldn't rather we decided to retire (laughs) because I think any bureaucrat would prefer to get on with his job without having to answer questions from the outside. Perhaps that's an unfair observation, I don't know.
- Interviewer: Do you think you thrive on the challenges that you're facing all the time?
- Joyce: No, I wouldn't say that. I think its not terribly good for me actually. Its quite stressful. So I couldn't say I thrive on it. And one thing that does make me cross is when people say to me, "you must love what you're doing", and on one occasion at a social evening a man came up to me and said, "Why do you write those letters to the newspaper, does it give you a sense of power?", and I wished that I could hit him (laughter). Really, on the contrary, in the beginning when I used to write letters to the newspaper, I used to feel quite ill on the mornings when I thought it might be published, I so hated to see my name in print. But I've got over that.
- Interviewer: So most of your correspondence to the newspaper would be in the Readers Opinions area? Do you every get an opportunity to have a story written representing your point of view in the other seciton of the paper?
- Joyce: Yes, I have had some articles published in the local paper in the past, but I haven't done any of that lately.
- Interviewer: But they will give you space?
- Joyce: Yes, if they consider its an issue that deserves it, I suppose.
- Interviewer: What about public speaking. I've no doubt that your involvement has lead to requests for that, and opportunities. Do you enjoy public speaking?
- Joyce: No, I don't. No I don't like it a bit. I'd much rather sit down at my trusty old typewriter and put it on paper.
- Interviewer: Do you see it as a worthwhile means of communicating the possibilities - to the different groups that you speak to?
- Joyce: When I'm asked to do it, which isn't very often, fortunately, I feel that I'm duty bound to do it. To get the message of the Resident Group movement across, more than anything, rather than the message on a particular issue, because I could easily put that in writing, once again.

Interviewer: Do you see the Resident's Group as being a stepping stone, for some people anyway, to more formal politics?

Joyce: No, I don't. But it's interesting you should ask me that question because I've noticed time and again that being a very active member of a resident's group often leads to a persons progress in life being enhanced.

I've seen young men who've come into a group with absolutely no skills of communication, who are not very good at thinking things through, or thinking things out, and by the time they'd had a couple of years experience they were ready for anything. And I know specific cases where they've got better jobs and bigger jobs through their increased awareness and their increased confidence in themselves.

Interviewer: What would you say are the greatest difficulties faced by a group of laymen, if you like, a group of residents that taking on the big developers. ...You know, you were talking about the Environmental Impact Statements and so forth?

Joyce: Well, of course, the thing that you have to be sure of is that if you're going to embark on some sort of issue you have to do your homework, you have to consult with people who are qualified in particular areas, get you facts together and then just take it from there.

Interviewer: You were talking about the lack of funds, which I suppose must be a problem sometimes, to be able to get independent reports about things like the issue on Kooragang Island, the Chemical Plants?

Interviewer: Yes, the Environmental Impact Statements that were issued by the Company were quite expensive and we didn't feel that we had the means to acquire them, they might have run into a couple of hundred dollars and that's big money to us. Fortunately, we were able to borrow them and there is often some means of getting around these problems.

Interviewer: But I suppose its too expensive and too difficult to be able to commission your own E I S?

Joyce: Yes. Unless we're lucky enough to have some scientist or some other expert in the field who will do it for nothing, and thats something that one doesn't like to ask.

Interviewer: I've got a copy here of a long, long list of issues which the Newcastle Hill Resident's Group has been involved in. Perhaps you can mention some of the greater achievements?



- Joyce: Just to mention a very few; the acquisition of the State Rail Authority land at Newcastle East; we were the initiators of a harbour foreshore park, although this is not generally publically known; we were responsible for saving Camp Shortland on the harbour foreshore and Shepherds Hill up in King Edward Park from public auction. If Camp Shortland had been publically auctioned and gone for private ownership then of course there would have been no Foreshore Park, as we know it. We were responsible for the removal of many of the billboards on the railway corridor into Newcastle; we were responsible for Fort Scratchley and King Edward Park being accepted and included on the Register of the National Estate. So those I think are pretty impressive achievements and I think it would be difficult to accuse us of narrow self-interest in those involvements; rather, most of our efforts seem to be devoted to the public interest and only a small portion of our work is taken up by purely neighbourhood matters.
- Interviewer: I think that's been the accusation hasn't it. I think perhpas in that newspaper article that was in the Herald in August, 1978, where the Chamber of Commerce were casting aspersions on so called 'pressure' groups, that was the inference, wasn't it, that the groups were made up of a minority who were only self interested. As you say, it's quite apparent that that's not the case.
- Joyce: It's really ironic for such an accusation to come from such a source. Because there is no more active, relatively small pressure group than the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- Interviewer: Do you think that the silent majority are apathetic about the issies which affect them and their environment?
- Joyce: I'm afraid that inertia is one of the biggest challenges than any community group has to face. You know that you've got a lot of supporters. You know that there are people who approve of what you are doing, but its impossible to get them to get up and do something about it.
- Interviewer: You can't see an easy solution to that, I suppose?
- Joyce: No.....there never has been. I've never read anywhere, where you can activate people who don't want to activated. It's a question; perhaps education eventually might do it.
- Interviewer: Or perhaps, depending on how closely affected they are by these issues, that groups like yours are fighting, things that you can't stop or halt, that really affect there day to day life and comfort?
- Joyce: Oh I think when that happens you'll find that there will be a lot of people come out and demonstrate, certainly, but if its a wider, broader issue then they tend to wait and let someone else do it.



Interviewer: How does your group keep informed of the issues that are coming up. I'm sure many people never hear about half the development plans being considered by Council, until a group like yours opposes it and creates publicity. So how can people become more aware?

Joyce: Well they can become aware, through belonging to a resident's group, because we keep them informed by newsletters and through yearly reports of our activities. Our workload is pretty enormous. In order to be able to educate people in that way, we've got to attend Council meetings, and we've got to read the Council minutes and agenda, and the business papers, generally be aware of what's going on.

We've got to keep in touch with Alderman who are sympathetic to our cause, and they can be very good in giving us information so that we can approach it before what we consider 'disastrous' things happen overnight.

Interviewer: Just in closing Joyce, perhaps you can tell me how your involvement with the Group and the time it takes and so forth, how that has affected your life, personally?

Joyce: Well, I'll like to preface answer to that, by once again talking about the value of resident's groups, by saying that I strongly believe that we in community groups can contribute a little to the common good and leave the world a better place than it might otherwise have been, because we act as agents for change; change for the better we believe.

But on a personal note. To be committed to a resident's group exerts a very powerful influence on the person involved and it changes them forever. They way you think and your perceptions of other people, and their motivations and their performances and your own performances, all these important things become a matter for scrutiny, your personal scrutiny, and I believe you have to move away from former friends and even family, not that you necessarily regard them with less affection or as less important, but somehow there's a gap in common interest if they aren't involved with you in the Resident's movement, and if you are thinking and working for new ideas and they are still engaged with the old order. So it's a bit lonely sometimes.

But perhaps the most valuable role of the Newcastle Hill Residents Group, to get back to that, which I always do, invariably, the importance will be in an historical context. Because our newsletters [Views and News] are part of the Local History and University archives and all our records; our files and correspondence etc. are part of the National Records in Canberra, so that researchers in years to come may base the history of Newcastle in some part on what emerges from these records as grass-roots thinking, revealed.

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AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

LECTURER

MARGARET HENRY

TERM 3 RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

DUE: 8SEP88

TOPIC:

THE EMERGING ROLE OF  
RESIDENT'S GROUPS AS A  
NECESSARY BALANCE AT THE  
'GRASS-ROOTS' OF LOCAL POLITICS

1000 words

Jan Reynolds

Thur 10-12

The Resident's Group movement has been active in Newcastle since the early 1970's. During that time, three main inner-city groups; the Newcastle East Resident's Group (NERG), the Newcastle Hill Resident's Group (NHRG) and the Cooks Hill Group, have evolved as a powerful entity at the grass-roots of local politics. Their contribution to the conservation of local heritage and environment and their fight for the retention of the traditional social fabric of the inner-city residential area has been significant and merits greater recognition. Local government has been forced to accept the inevitability of community participation via resident's groups and must now recognise the valuable role they play, as their concern with environmental issues provides a necessary balance to the developers, whose primary concern is with economics.<sup>1</sup>

During the past two or three decades there has been a gradual change in community attitudes and many people see much to criticize in the achievements of public sector organisations. Indeed, "Disillusionment with the public sector is one of the key features of many western societies in the last quarter of the twentieth century."<sup>2</sup> Post-war Australia has seen an unprecedented rate of social change, but bureaucratic organisations like local government are unable to change at such a rapid rate, and their rigidity has proven to be inefficient.<sup>3</sup> Yet, surprisingly, "until the late 1960's the domestic actions of Australian Governments aroused astonishingly little protest".<sup>4</sup>

In post-war Newcastle the failures of urban planning escalated to create an environment highly conducive to the growth of resident action groups. Docherty suggests that this failure in urban planning "may be attributed to the interdependence of economic and urban planning after 1945."<sup>5</sup> In the late 1940's the city's planners forecast Newcastle's future as mainly an industrial one, and believed it was essential to attract industry, regardless of the social and environmental costs.<sup>6</sup> Even as recently as 1973, the Secretary of the Newcastle Chamber of Commerce was quoted as saying "We want industry, industry to employ people. Industry as we know it means some smoke and dust, and you can't get away from that."<sup>7</sup> This attitude may be understandable, but does not take into account the high social costs industry has exacted from Newcastle. The sentiment seems to have permeated much of the thinking since that time, although commercial 'development' now seems to rival industry in its prospective impact on the urban environment.

1. Suters, Busteed, Lester, Firth, Newcastle Inner Areas Conservation Planning Study: Final Report, Newcastle, 1984, p.107
2. M.A. Jones, Organisation and Social Planning in Australian Local Government, Melbourne 1977,p.1
3. Ibid. p.16
4. R.N. Spann, Government Administration in Australia, Sydney, 1979, p.475
5. J.C. Docherty, Newcastle: The Making of an Australian City, Sydney, 1978, p.160
6. Ibid. p.160
7. Australian Financial Review, 16APR73, quoted in Ibid. p.160

A significant depletion of the inner-city population; (5,000 residents migrated out between 1947 and 1961,) and the subsequent fear that the area could become a 'ghost-town' prompted ambitious urban-renewal plans that foresaw medium to high density accommodation developments replacing existing deteriorating houses, commercial buildings and vacant land. 8 If such plans were imprudently implemented they constituted a real threat to those communities; traffic congestion, inadequate parking, loss of historic character and disruption to the social fabric.

In recent years there have been many salient environmental and planning issues which have served to mobilise local communities and generally elevate local political awareness. Communities are clearly no longer prepared to have the decisions and actions that affect their lives, taken for them, but are demanding a direct say in their Council's decision making.9

Because of the inflexibility of local government, people are turning increasingly to 'third-sector' organisations; the public interest groups such as resident's action groups and socially concerned trade unions who are extremely effective in achieving their ambitious aims.10 These groups are also very skilful in their use of non-violent tactics and competent handling of the press and the various acts of passive resistance they employ, makes them much more flexible than local government.11 Action groups in particular, usually focus on a specific issue and therefore develop specialised knowledge which is in distinct contrast to the general purpose, often unfocused local government unit. They also frequently attract skilled, unpaid, motivated effort; an important feature of their efficiency.12

The first resident's action groups to appear in Australia were in the Sydney suburbs of Paddington and Balmain, both areas of unique historic value and character, that clearly warranted conservation.13

The emergence of powerful resident's groups in Newcastle was precipitated by several cumulative factors. There had been an influx of articulate residents into the inner-city area during the late sixties and early seventies and an awakening of the social identity of long term residents; a burgeoning universal interest in heritage, particularly architectural, and a conviction that the City was interested in development at any cost, which threatened the destruction of the inner-city both visually and socially by new development.14

8. Docherty, Newcastle..., p.156
9. J. Floyd and D. Palmer, Corporate Management in Local Government: An Introduction, Melbourne, 1985, p.96
10. Jones, Organisational..., p.16
11. Ibid. p.16
12. M.A. Jones, Local Government and the People: Challenges for the Eighties, Melbourne, 1981, p.239
13. P.J. Boyce (Ed.), Dictionary of Australian Politics, Melbourne, 1980
14. Suters, Busted, Lester, Firth, Newcastle..., p.98



Co-operation and support for the resident's groups in Newcastle has come from many areas, the most notable being the successful application of Green Bans imposed by sympathetic unions to delay work in the East End in support of the Newcastle East Resident's Group, until an 'agreed-plan' was prepared.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to acting as a "valuable first line of defence for the individual and the neighbourhood against the impersonal bureaucratic and business structure..." the resident's groups have worked both separately and co-operatively to initiate many actions which have resulted in the improvement and protection of the inner-city environment and the conservation of valuable heritage areas.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the first architect designed landscape plan for the harbour foreshore area was initiated by the Citizens Foreshore Committee, comprised of representatives of the resident's groups in conjunction with the Northern Parks and Playground Movement. Their actions raised community awareness and stimulated Council activity which eventually resulted in the Harbour Foreshore Park, currently enjoyed by so many local people and visitors.

Not surprisingly, the resident's groups have not escaped criticism. "Local residents...who take an active interest in local affairs have often been regarded by Councils and their staff as 'ratbags' and stirrers'..."<sup>17</sup> In 1984, Mr Bob James, retired Town Planner accused "action groups of pressuring the self-interest of minorities which obscured the real needs and views of the wider community".<sup>18</sup> In 1978, the Chamber of Commerce, whose own interests in the commercial development of the City were obviously threatened, requested Council to compile a register of all groups acting on behalf of business and residents, containing comprehensive details about membership and attendance at meetings etc. because they believed "some resident action groups were able to get publicity disproportionate to their size and that a group with only two or three members might sway public opinion by shouting loudly."<sup>19</sup> Such a sentiment would seem to arbitrarily presuppose that it is the Council or Chamber rather than the resident's group who represents the so called 'silent-majority' in the community.

The activities of the resident's groups in the immediate inner-city area have served to heighten community awareness of the social, historic and environmental qualities of the area. They have established a precedent to involve the community and the groups that represent it, in most of the major planning decisions affecting their neighbourhood. Their opinion is now actively sought by the City Council and they are well represented on numerous steering committees undertaking special projects and studies affecting the inner-city. Indeed, a combination of seven inner city groups were responsible for a review of the 'Residential Flat Code' which resulted in Development Control Plan:14 being published in August 1986 and reflecting the principles expressed in the final recommendations of those groups.<sup>20</sup>

15. Suters.Busteed,Leser,Firth, Newcastle...,p.104
16. J. Bond, Letter to the Editor 15/7/83 quoting Dr John Patterson past President, Hunter District Waterboard
17. Floyd & Palmer, Corporate...,p.96
18. The Post, 8th February, 1984
19. The Newcastle Morning Herald, Aug86
20. Archives of the Newcastle Hill Resident's Group

In the past twenty years in Newcastle, resident's groups have evolved as a dynamic movement, whose efforts and influence have helped shape an improved and exciting city. Their focus on the preservation of the environment and the social and historic heritage of the City has contributed to Newcastle's heightened profile as a desirable tourist destination. Moreover, the actions of the resident's groups in conjunction with other conservation bodies, have saved many unique heritage items from becoming the 'victims of progress'. It is also evident that "a new balance has been struck in the development approach between the developer, who is primarily concerned with economics and the residents who stress the environmental issues."<sup>21</sup> Local government could learn a lot from the success of action groups. They could change tactics and act as a pressure group themselves, against other levels of government and private enterprise and by adopting such non-bureaucratic methods would revitalise their role and their image and inspire a measure of confidence in the community that elected them. 22

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21. Suters, Busted, Lester, Firth, Newcastle... p.107
22. Jones, Local Government ..., p.239

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- Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner's Advocate Index, 1965 to date
- Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner's Advocate, 1970 to date

### Newsletters:

- Newcastle East Gazette, NERG, 1973 to date
- Views and News, NHRG, 1978 to date

### Unpublished documents:

Files of Newcastle Hill Resident's Group (maintained by Joyce Bond, Exec.) including -

Letter to the Editor of Newcastle Herald 15/7/83, J. Bond

Address to the Faculty of Community Medicine, University of Newcastle on 14JUL82 - "Role of Resident's Groups in the Community", J. Bond

Address to the Newcastle Diocese - Training in Ministry at St John's College, Morpeth, 16JUL88 - "Bringing About Change in the Community",

Address to Rotary Club 28/5/84 by E. Jackson Vice President NHRG<sup>J. Bond</sup>

Taped interview with Joyce Bond, President NHRG, 3AUG88

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

O R A L H I S T O R Y P R O J E C T

SUMMARY OF  
INTERVIEW WITH

J O Y C E B O N D

EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
OF  
NEWCASTLE HILL RESIDENT'S GROUP

BY

JAN REYNOLDS

ON

3RD AUGUST 1988



Joyce Bond, President of the Newcastle Hill Resident's Group, possesses an energy and determination that belie her 71 years. She has been a resident of The Hill in Newcastle since the 1950's and through her commitment to the Hill Group, which she pioneered in 1975, Joyce has made a vital contribution to the conservation of the unique social and historical character of the inner-city area.

It was after witnessing the problems experienced by the Newcastle East Resident's Group in the battle to save their area from demolition, that Joyce realised it was important for the Hill community to organise a properly constituted group to counter possible threats of a similar nature to their own neighbourhood.

In 1975, Joyce approached several residents of The Hill area, whom she anticipated might be sympathetic, and established a Steering Committee. The Committee called a Public Meeting, which was held on March 28th, 1976 at the Christ Church Cathedral. The meeting was chaired by the Dean of the Cathedral, the very Reverend Robert Beale, and was attended by 73 people; it was here that the Newcastle Hill Resident's Group (NHRG) was "born".

Although Resident's Groups are most often formed around a particular issue, the NHRG began as a common interest group which could provide a forum of discussion of common problems, for the exchange of ideas, for working out proposals for legislative reform and to devise tactics to deal with "uninformed, unsympathetic, insensitive or merely uncaring authorities".

The NHRG has not only played a defensive role against unsympathetic planning and development proposals. They have also taken the initiative in several conservation issues and have expended a considerable amount of energy to achieve the positive results which can now be shared and enjoyed by the wider community. The Group were instrumental in the acquisition of State Rail Authority land at Newcastle East; initiators of a harbour foreshore park; responsible for saving Camp Shortland and Shepherd's Hill from public auction and were also responsible for Fort Scratchley and King Edward Park being accepted and included on the Register of the National Estate.

Critics have accused the NHRG of narrow self-interest, but it is apparent from their list of innumerable achievements that they are not only concerned with neighbourhood matters but involve themselves in issues affecting a much broader social and geographical area.

A regular newsletter 'Views and News' is produced by the NHRG and edited by Joyce, to keep the community informed about the Group's activities and to highlight current issues. Copies of the newsletter are held both in the Local History and University Archives and the Group's files and correspondence are part of the National Records in Canberra. They should provide an invaluable resource for future researchers.

The NHRG and more particularly, Joyce, as their President, have earned a reputable status in their role at the "grass-roots" of local politics. Their opinion is frequently sought by Planning authorities and other interested parties as is their representation on several committees; a testimony to the respect they command.

From a personal view point, Joyce believes she has been a lucky and priveleged person throughout her life and that perhaps her foray into community affairs has given her an opportunity to repay in a small way, some of the advantages she has enjoyed. Joyce denies that she thrives on the challenge of her demanding role, conversely she is quick to admit that it is often very stressful. Her commitment to her work in the NHRG has meant, sadly, a loss of common interest with those friends and family who are not involved in similar activities, therefore although Joyce's role in the Group is a vitally important one, she has found it can also be a lonely one.

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Signed MJ Bond .....

Date 3 AUG 88 .....

Interviewer J Reynolds .....