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Whose pain? Whose shame? Integrating heritage and histories in Ballarat, Australia

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ABSTRACT

For generations a burden of misplaced shame has sat with victim-survivors of children's institutionalisation. Experiences and memories of family separation, cultural obliteration, mistreatment, hunger, unpaid labour, curtailed educational and professional opportunities, and abuse had come to silently define and destroy the lifelong living experience of childhood incarceration. Meanwhile, institutions and the communities they are part of have been able to effectively ignore the legacies of their own trespasses, through 'top-down', celebratory approaches to history and heritage. In recent decades, renewed emphasis on survivor voices and agency has culminated in a range of Commonwealth and state-based reports, Inquiries and Commissions, driven by abundant survivor testimonies and truth-telling. The sense of shame and guilt over these parts of our collective histories has now re-centred on the perpetrators and enablers of abuse and mistreatment. Using interpretive heritage and historical lens this article outlines a theoretical conception of 'integrated' approaches to history and heritage, using real-life examples from contemporary urban development and institutional heritage in the regional Australian city of Ballarat. The authors examine changing contemporary representations of institutional Care, neglect and abuse, arguing that shifting cultural and social power is reflected in the urban landscape and cultural fabric of the associated institutions.

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Using the regional Australian city of Ballarat as a heritage site for evaluating and interpreting social dimensions of institutional Care and abuse, this article argues that integrated survivor-led and professional historical representations are critical to addressing institutional histories and associated intangible heritage. We do this through exploration of two survivor-led moments of heritage contestation: the Heritage Council of Victoria's (HCV) determinations on the site heritage significance of the former Ballarat District Orphan Asylum, Ballarat Orphanage, and Ballarat Children's Home in the 2010s along with the reinterpretation of institutional histories at the community sector organisation called Cafs in 2023. An acronym of Child and Family Services, Cafs is a key regional community sector organisation and the modern-day incarnation of those historical institutions. It is critical that organisations like Cafs and cities like Ballarat, who were actively involved in some of the more difficult and painful parts of Australia's history, consciously address their historical legacies and intangible heritage following the 'age of testimony' from the 1990s-onwards (Attwood 2008).[1] This article proposes an approach to

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institutional heritage founded on an empathetic synthesis of contrasting historical methods, extending the arguments of Reeves and Logan, who wrote about 'places of pain and shame' in 2009 (Logan and Reeves 2009). Utilising narratives of resistance and survival alongside long-dominant narratives of institutional control, we propose an integrated method that combines these perspectives allowing multiple narrative identities for individuals, institutions, and places. This requires organisations to build and develop trust – a quality in short supply after generations of neglect and abuse. By highlighting contemporary institutional approaches to painful histories in Ballarat, the article helps other organisations to engage in trust-building, in all its messy contradictions, as it develops historically informed approaches to contemporary practice.

These actions belong to a range of self-conscious efforts at organisational 'Narrative Identity Formation' (McGinniss 2020; Murphy 2010; Somers 1994). These narrative identities cannot exist in isolation from the broader communities in which they are located, nor can they ignore the emergent and increasingly central 'counter-narratives' of Care leavers and other survivors of institutional harm (Golding 2021). With a vast array of histories available even within a single organisation, the kinds of narrative identities articulated and understood are in many ways a matter of organisational choice, as well as inherited culture. The examples in this article show how organisations can and do self-consciously shape their cultures, based on deliberate engagement with histories once considered too difficult to confront. Equally, however, it shows how organisations can simultaneously create space for others to understand and tell their own histories, by providing platforms and opportunities, then – as much as possible – getting out of the way. This ambivalent approach to history can be consolidated in the acknowledgement of a 'shared authority' about histories.

Challenging an authorised heritage discourse

Ballarat is famous for its prominent role in the Australian goldrush. The built artefacts of its past are apparent to all, presented proudly and prominently. Urban landscapes of grand Victorian architecture, large boulevards, gold-funded infrastructure, and historic civic institutions, churches, and cathedrals sit alongside twisting and winding traces of the spontaneously formed tracks of nineteenth century gold diggers, now set permanently as inner-suburban backstreets. Established narratives of goldrush grandeur, ingenuity and anti-authoritarian rebellion have largely driven this city's self-identity for generations.

Weston Bate's two-volume biographies of Ballarat, *Lucky City* (1978) and *Life After Gold* (1993), are considered definitive work in the historiography of Australian urban and social history. 'Out of Ballarat's unusual social experience' in the nineteenth century, wrote Bate, 'came a unique urban consciousness' that emphasised civic pride and community cohesion: a self-confident bourgeois society (Bate 1978, 220).

This narrative has served Ballarat well, so that despite the rushes having ended over one hundred years ago, the city continues largely to define its heritage identity with emphasis on the built form of goldrush era structures and urban forms. However, as Laurajane Smith writes, 'tensions ... inevitably exist between the idea of memory, which must always invoke a sense of the possibility of forgetting, and the idea of heritage' as constructed in the notion of an authorised heritage discourse that actively remembers the '"good" things that lend credence to a sense of cultural and communal pride in identity' (Smith 2006, 58).

In recent years, then, a more forceful narrative has entered the local historical vernacular, connecting Ballarat firmly to matters of national and global urgency. Histories of egregious abuse of children, perpetrated and enabled by people in positions of power through Ballarat's numerous religious and non-religious institutions, have also come to define Ballarat (see the Ballarat Case Study from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, McClellan, Coate, and Murray 2017). Together with histories of institutionalisation and its routine

deprivations, these 'memories' of Ballarat represent a shameful and painful past, and a necessary challenge to more triumphant versions of Ballarat's history.[2] Many of these Ballarat sites are now derelict, redeveloped or commercialised, having changed in purpose and form so significantly that they are barely recognisable.

One way of examining Ballarat's sites of difficult memory is through an interdisciplinary driven approach that engages with heritage concepts of place and memory studies. This approach assists with present day attempts at healing, redress and historical justice for Care leavers and victims of institutional child sex abuse. A special issue of Historic Environment was dedicated to the theme of places of trauma and healing (Hayes et al. 2020; McLay, Parkin, and McGinniss 2020 44–47). The concept of *lieux de memoire*, or 'sites of memory' for history and heritage studies is well-worn terrain especially regarding war memory and commemoration and a panoply of state national identity management initiatives (Derderian 2002; Reeves 2018). For the purposes of this article, and its application to Care leavers and institutional abuse in Ballarat, 'sites of memory' are perhaps best understood as part of broader application of the concept and the wider body of literature particularly how it can be understood in terms of dark heritage (Fuggle 2020; Wüstenberg 2022). There are a number of significant works that have built on this framework and inform this article including Catterall's observations about changing attitudes to the past (Catterall 2017). It is important to note that all the Ballarat institutions discussed in this article to varying degrees are associated with traumatic memories. This surrounds cases of abuse and the legacies that inform inter-generational memories. This has been driven by Marianne Hirsch's notion of post memory, a form of remembrance whereby 'those family stories . . . have come to assume a life of their own' (Hirsch 2008). This involves the use of non-conventional techniques to capture the complexities of what Jay Winter has called 'collective remembrance' (1999) and interpreting difficult heritage at sites such as Ballarat in innovative more culturally sensitive ways (Stylianou-Lambert, Bounia, and Heraclidou 2022).

Ballarat's heavily referenced 1850s gold rush era heritage itself serves as a site of memory in ways that maintain a 'sense of connection to the past' (Logan and Reeves 2009, 2; Nora 1989). This privileging of one era means that the very difficult history and remnant heritage legacies of child incarceration have until recently been avoided. The shame and denial of perpetrators and enablers have prevailed over the victims of institutional abuse. We deliberately locate our reading of Ballarat and pathways of more open heritage disclosure in relation to so-called '"benevolent" sites of incarceration', such as the former Orphanage and Children's Home. Logan and Reeves suggest that although ostensibly such institutions were established to incarcerate people 'for their own good', they often end up, in the tradition of Michel Foucault, as sites of 'social stigmatisation' for the incarcerated (Logan and Reeves 2009, 8).

Recent developments in public heritage in Ballarat have begun to invert such notions into the public and collective realm and subvert notions of shame that reside within individuals to the rightful owners of such emotions – institutions. For instance, the 'Continuous Voices' project proposes a 'memorial' to all survivors of sexual abuse to be installed in public parkland in central Ballarat, co-designed by local survivors and artists (Creative 2023). The Art Gallery of Ballarat's Out of the Darkness exhibition in 2020, curated by activist and institutional abuse survivor Robert House, publicly displayed the effects of institutionalised abuse to the Ballarat public, provocatively inviting them to reflect on collective responsibility (Art Gallery of Ballarat 2021). As described below, ongoing historical interpretation at the former Ballarat Children's Home and Orphanage employs a co-designed approach that emphasises the painful yet ambivalent experiences of childhood institutionalisation in a prominent urban location (McLay, Parkin, and McGinniss 2020).

Perhaps the most visible expression of this 'inversion' of shame expressed through urban locations has been the LOUD fence movement initiated in Ballarat, through which ribbons are tied on the fences of perpetrator and enabling organisations in solidarity with abuse survivors (LOUDfence Inc 2023; McDonald 2023, Bell 2019; Wilson and Golding 2018). It represents a powerful and public expression of awareness and support in ways previously unavailable to survivors and their fellow citizens.

Cultures of silence, fuelled by pain and shame, have enabled such tragedy and trauma to sit uncomfortably near the surface in Ballarat, in a liminal zone that oscillates between 'cover-up' and 'common knowledge'. The ribbons of LOUD fence, the halls of the Art Gallery, the forthcoming sites of recognition at the Ballarat Children's Home site, and the Continuous Voices monument, combine to mark the streets, fences and institutions of Ballarat as sites of 'common knowledge'. The kinds of common knowledge previously used in defence of the institutions are now reclaimed.[3] They act against those forms of power that oversaw the shameful abuse, neglect and cover-up that happened in these places. This shame – rarely a productive emotion – historically has been imposed on children and the adults they became, disempowered by structural and cultural power forces beyond their ability to challenge. It is now the shame of organisations who chose to cover tracks, including the Ballarat Orphanage (see for instance King 2021).

Heritage, preservation and interpretation at the former institutional site

In 1866, the Ballarat and District Orphan Asylum accepted the first children at its consolidated residential campus on Victoria Street, Ballarat East. A typical example of what Erving Goffmann has characterised as a 'total institution' (Goffman 1990), it would house 200 and more children at a time, with an onsite school, a fully operational farm, and a labour network of children who habitually worked and sustained the operation. In 1909, the Orphan Asylum became the Ballarat Orphanage, and in the 1960s the old Asylum building was dismantled and replaced with smaller 'Cottages', and the name changed to the Ballarat Children's Home. In 1983, the last of more than 4,500 children passed through its gates (McGinniss 2020).

After a period as the site of a Catholic secondary school, following a building exchange between the new post-institutional organisation and the Catholic church, the site was sold in 2011 to private developers for conversion to residential and commercial facilities. A number of former inmate-residents of Ballarat Orphanage and Children's Home[4] appealed against the Heritage Council of Victoria's (HCV) decision not to classify the site as of State Significance, thus circumventing conservation controls.[5] In opposing the residents, the developers commissioned a professional historian to inform a Conservation Management Plan. It derided the 'remnant fabric' on site, claiming it had been changed 'beyond recognition and should be demolished', with the exception of the Toddlers' Block which the developers intended to recycle as a medical centre (Chen 2011).[6]

The former residents' case focussed on community identity and shared sense of historic place. In opposing the State Significance application, the historian characterised the former residents' position as 'a very personal response' (Chen 2011, 53).

In its final decision on the former Ballarat Children's Home, Orphanage and Orphan Asylum site, Heritage Council Victoria (HCV) found that the site 'does not reach the threshold for State significance ... for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register' (HCV 2011, 11). This was in large part because 'the [original] 1865 building has been demolished', the Council explained, so 'no fabric remains to demonstrate associations [with large-scale residential child welfare instutitionalisation]' , (HCV 2011, 5). In a submission from its Executive Director, HCV had heard that charitable institutions in the nineteenth century were often constructed as grand and publicly visible buildings, and that such grand architecture reflected the importance that goldrush society placed on providing for its 'underprivileged' population.

An architectural form and its representation of an obsolescent social value of providing for underprivileged communities, were preferred over the current and present social value put forward by former residents. The characterisation of the 'great personal' social values of the appellants, (HCV 2011, 5) set aside not only the more than 4,500 other individuals who were residents in the past 117 years but took no account of the collective experience of countless others in Australia, as documented in the Senate Committee Report of 2004. Its consolidated account provides a very different – survivors' informed view of those same style of institutional buildings:

> Various factors have been used . . . to define institutions, including size, overcrowding, separateness from the community, regimentation, external control, [lack of] identity, choice and autonomy, and physically and emotionally barren environments. (Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2004, 17)

When the HCV suggested the site was of 'Local' significance, the City of Ballarat commissioned its own history as part of a heritage assessment of the site (Rowe 2012).[7] This version found that the 1919 schoolhouse had significance because it was rare example of a surviving school building of the era, whereas the developer's historian declared it had no heritage value because its roofline had been altered (Chen 2011). Both historians prioritised the physical elements of the buildings.

An original brick wall on the perimeter of the property also received attention. '[T]he pier-braced brick boundary wall . . . runs for approximately 100 metres', wrote one of the heritage assessors. It was significant, in his view, because 'most of this is in a weathered variant of Yorkshire bond with three stretchers separating each header' (Chen 2011, A30).

It was on this wall that so many of the children of the Orphanage and Children's Home sat, facing the spot where the tram terminated at the corner, hoping and yearning to see a parent, or a family member alight. Some hid behind the wall, smoking improvised bark cigarettes in a gesture of mild rebellion. Many would have stood behind that wall, looking up with despair at what seemed an insurmountable barrier to the world outside. There is no-one, we contend, who would have felt the wall's significance as 'a weathered variant of Yorkshire bond'.[8]

With heritage decisions made, appealed and upheld, different structures demolished, neglected or preserved, attention has moved to historical interpretation onsite. At the time of writing, this task is ongoing. A childcare facility and supermarket have opened, and residential properties are rapidly rising. The City of Ballarat have commissioned local historians[9] and designers to respond to the priorities and ideas of former inmate-residents[10] to develop appropriate recognition of the site's ambivalent and difficult past (McLay, Parkin, and McGinniss 2020).

An Interpretation Plan had been developed in 2017 by representatives of the site developers and Cafs, that identified six sites where interpretation should occur. It also provided guidance and instruction on the design and messaging to be included. As it was developed without the input of any former residents, and was heavily influenced by stories and ideas of institutional achievement rather than individual survival and resistance, it was rejected by the City of Ballarat on advice of from the Former Residents' Working Group.

Having driven this approach to historical interpretation along the lines of conventional narratives that had animated its histories for generations, Cafs – about to embark on a significantly different approach to its difficult histories as described below – made the conscious decision to exclude itself from any direct influence or control over on-site interpretation. Its role is limited to supplying images for interpretation materials from its archives. This renewed approach, whereby former residents drive the conceptual and thematic interpretation of their site's histories, with technical requirements and detailed content handled by independent and bureaucratic professionals, is prompting cautious optimism about the prospect of empathetic development.[11]

Narrative identity formation in an organisation with difficult histories

The relationship between Ballarat heritage sites is underpinned by their shared history as institutions associated with difficult heritage. We contend that when considered together they can be read as *lieux de memoire* of difficult heritage. Cafs is an enduring Ballarat institution (established during the second half of the nineteenth century) that has multiple significant sites associated with institutional child sex abuse that are traumatic sites of memory. Cafs' role as a key stakeholder in the difficult heritage and subsequent response is central to understanding Ballarat as an epicentre of global institutional child sex abuse. Driven by a burgeoning awareness of its own responsibilities to developing more critical, post-Royal Commission approaches to institutional histories, including its

own histories, Cafs has been instrumental in developing new strategies for historical justice for inclusive care-leaver led interpretation and commemoration.

In 1983 the last children left the Ballarat Children's Home, instead being placed in various community group homes around the community. Since then, the organisation has navigated the rapidly changing social services sector through various name changes and program priorities to become the modern Community Sector Organisation it is today: Cafs Ballarat. It is, and always has been, a non-religious organisation, led by a Committee of Management made up of community members and civic leaders.

Having described approaches to urban development on the former institutional site, we now turn our attention to the ways that history and heritage have been approached in the institution itself. In 1965, the Ballarat Orphanage celebrated its centenary. The Board of Management commissioned Ethel Morris, a local former journalist, to compile an official history to mark the occasion (Morris 1965).

Morris's *A Century of Child Care* was for many years considered the definitive history of the institution. It was still being distributed to clients and community members as recently as the mid-2010s. To a reader who resided at the Orphanage as a child,[12] however, it was a perplexing publication. Morris's version of the Ballarat Orphanage and Orphan Asylum seems to have been peopled almost exclusively by adults. Adults are mentioned by individual names 240 times: board or committee members (100 times); staff including honorary medical and other professionals, teachers, volunteers and managers (82); eminent visitors who came for an hour or two (35), and financial benefactors (23).

By contrast, Morris mentioned fewer than ten children by name, several of them former residents who had 'done well' and left generous bequests. We also learn that three boys gained scholarships and a girl graduated as a trained nurse – but they are nameless, and we learn nothing more about them. We learn that the boys' band was often successful at local competitions, but the praise goes to the bandmasters. We learn that the boys made lots of sturdy boots, were handy on the farm, and later made good soldiers for King and Country. The girls, we read, made excellent clothing and bedding. There is nothing about the daily life of children – the rowdiness, the fights, the laughter, the sirens that marked the routine of repetitive days and nights, the queues for porridge, rabbit stew, or laxatives. Nor is there anything about how the children coped with feelings of being abandoned and not wanted, and the harsh punishment meted out by untrained and overworked staff.

Throughout Morris's history not a page is turned that does not mention funding, buildings and facilities. Her narrative was based almost entirely on picking highlights from the Annual Reports (themselves a selection of favourable yearly events), and it is reasonable to conclude that the publication was written primarily to impress benefactors and appeal to potential donors. That being so, it is not surprising that, like many other commissioned institutional histories, its tone is congratulatory.

Fifty years later, the cultural context and associated historical landscape surrounding the institutions' landmark anniversary was entirely different. 2015 was the height of publicity and awareness of the Royal Commission's inquiries. In Ballarat, the Commission had held multiple sessions locally, hearing direct testimony from dozens of survivors of child sexual abuse in May of that year, with more hearings scheduled.

Cafs has been transparent in responding to civil litigation initiated by former residents who were abused in their Care, has cooperated in criminal prosecutions and participated fully in the National Redress Scheme implemented following a key recommendation of the Royal Commission. It has paid considerable monetary damages to individuals who were abused in its care. The justice system is far from perfect however, and nor is the National Redress Scheme (Kruk 2021). Neither can erase the pain of abuse, neglect and cover-up.

In this context, then, what can institutions do to address their complex heritage? It is a particular challenge for organisations like Cafs. They carry their histories with them, with all their tragedies

and losses. Yet they need to carry on as a modern, responsive organisation with deep responsibilities to contemporary clients.

2015 was also the 150th Anniversary of the establishment of the Ballarat District Orphan Asylum's Committee of Management. To mark the occasion Cafs organised a range of events and projects aimed at celebrating its history. The most prominent of these activities was the creation and opening of the Cafs 'Research and Legacy Centre', in the newly renovated basement of its Ballarat Headquarters. This was a no-expense-spared, professionally curated, museum-style exhibition, featuring interactive digital displays, audio-recorded exhibition guides, and the installation of museum-grade display cabinets containing artefacts up to 150 years-old. Open to the public, with tours available for purchase by visiting school groups, it presented history as an 'asset' for the organisation. The space was available for commercial hire, with a high-grade video production encouraging donations to the newly established Cafs Foundation, and plans for the publication of a history book based on a newly commissioned PhD project.[13]

To the casual visitor, the professional presentation values of this public institutional history were impressive. The imbalance of children to adults identified above in the previous version of the Orphanage's history had been addressed somewhat, with the inclusion of recorded interviews with some former residents,[14] and profiles on some former residents. The Exhibition showed signs that Cafs had begun to address its shameful histories. An apology to victim-survivors of abuse – albeit a guarded and cautious one – was displayed prominently, although it had not been delivered to the former residents before publication.

There is no way of knowing the ways in which the exhibition was received in the broader community, but the attention being paid to the institution's legacies was, without doubt, a marked progression from the narrow version of institutional histories written fifty years previously. However, these later versions were at odds with the ways in which institutional histories were understood by many survivors of those institutions, and by much of the broader public.

For instance, the exhibition included a detailed panel on the ways in which the Orphanage provided ample opportunities for young people to thrive, evidenced by the many ribbons and awards the children received at agricultural shows, and singing competitions. Missing from this picture however was the forced farming labour that enabled such achievements. Or the ways in which children were essentially displayed in competitions as Public Relations pieces, inadvertent advertisements for the intended virtues of colonial approaches to child welfare. These were ironies not lost on some ex-inmates, including one author of this article. The new version of history being presented in the Legacy Centre, it turned out, had more characteristics in common with Morris's older version, than contemporary versions informed by a renewed understanding of institutional Care in the Age of Testimony.

The sesquicentennial anniversary initiatives were no doubt well-intentioned by Cafs' leadership, generously resourced, and professionally presented. However, operating in an environment shaped heavily by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, in which awareness of and attention on shameful histories was greatly magnified, in 2020 Cafs' new leadership embarked on a different approach to its history. Equipped with an array of new narratives of the institutional histories (McGinniss 2020) and having revived previously distant relationships with a number of critical former inmate-residents of the Children's Home and Orphanage, Cafs significantly overhauled its representation of history and it present day heritage.

In 2021 Cafs created a history and records team whose continuing task is to maximise access for former residents to their own records through community engagement and practice improvement. A 'Former Resident Working Group' was formed, made up of people who had either themselves lived in the Ballarat Orphanage and the Ballarat Children's Home, or were children of former residents. While the membership of this group has been somewhat dependent on existing relationships within and between certain individuals, particularly during the limited social interactions required during COVID pandemic restrictions, it has aimed to include representation across a range of demographic characteristics of former residents. As

such it includes representation from older generations who were part of the Ballarat Orphanage era, younger generations who were part of the Ballarat Children's Home, Aboriginal representation, and representation from the descendants of former residents. Further diversity and depth of representation remains an ongoing goal. In the meantime, the Group has taken responsibility for advising and leading Cafs through the transformation in historical interpretation that has occurred in the years since.

Cafs has taken a number of steps to address the operational and symbolic implications of a commitment to addressing its ambivalent historical legacies. It has committed publicly to renewing it approaches to record-keeping and release, in line with principles of 'transformative justice' (Evans et al. 2021). This was done by committing to the implementation of the 'Lifelong Rights in Records Charter', developed by Monash University, Federation University, the Create Foundation and the Care Leavers' Australasia Network (CLAN) (Golding et al. 2021; Golding, McKemmish, and Reed 2021).

The Working Group has taken control of organising annual reunions, in a powerful and effective way of confirming a new direction for relationships with former residents. Current leadership has grown more aware of its responsibility to declare difficult histories, rather than conceal them. For instance, the names of former leaders implicated in the perpetration and cover-up of abuse have been crossed off the organisation's prominently displayed 'Honour Board', translucent red lines highlighting rather than obscuring their shame. A training and professional development program is being developed to educate current staff on the impacts of history on their organisation, and their practices as the creators of records for their clients.

Some details about the history of the organisation have been updated, based on information highlighted in the PhD project mentioned above (McGinniss 2020). For instance, the organisation's foundation date has been updated to 1866, the first year in which children came to the Ballarat District Orphan Asylum, rather than the previously understood 1865, which was the date of the first committee of management's meeting. Similarly, the founders of the organisation are now recognised as the first nine children who entered the Ballarat District Orphan Asylum in 1866 – Robert and Henry Phillips; Mary Ann Watson; Catherine, Sophia and John King; James Challen; and Josiah and Frances Bisgrove – rather than the first committee members who had previously been credited with establishing the organisation. In 2021, an office renovation created new meeting rooms which were named after the newly recognised founders. The names of the first children in the institution are now built deep into the structures and systems of the modern organisation, as each staff member invokes them every time they attempt to book a room in the internal booking system.

This was not done in a spirit of historical obscuratism, but rather to help recalibrate the organisation's identity towards the primacy of children and families within its self-identity, and to honour the experiences of children in its establishment and ongoing operation. These are the symbolic yet tangible changes that help drive a culture of child-centred practice consistent with the broader goals and principles of the organisation.

The largest and most obvious element of the renewed approach to history at Cafs was the dismantling of the 'Legacy Centre' exhibition, that had been the centrepiece of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 2015.[15] In February 2023, a new 'History and Memory Centre' was opened, the new name having been voted on by former residents in an open call through the newly re-established regular newsletter. The basement area that housed the previous display was completely re-worked, including panels and artefacts emphasising the ambivalent and difficult relationships that children and the adults they became have had with the institutions. Where the previous exhibition had attempted to prosecute a coherent narrative of organisational progress and achievement, the new version resembled what Andrea Witcomb has described as a 'pedagogy of feeling', the visitor tasked with 'creat[ing] meanings by working the spaces between … juxtapositions, both within individual stories and across stories across the exhibition as a whole' (Witcomb 2015, 323).

A feature of the new History and Memory Centre is the display of artworks by former institutional residents. Some include the creative representation and re-interpretation of their own records discovered in the archives of Cafs. Other artworks show the former Orphanage buildings, while others are simply beautiful pieces of art about subjects unrelated to institutional life. The space will continue to display new artworks of former inmates and residents, if and when they are lent to Cafs. In October 2023, professional artists ran a series of workshops with former residents, with a resulting public exhibition at a local art gallery titled 'inVISIBLE: We were here. We are here' in December, further illustrating Cafs' new role in staging opportunities for the self-expression of former residents.

A significantly longer, more fulsome apology was written by Cafs with the Former Residents' Working Group. This included expressions of sorrow for all aspects of institutionalisation – separation from families, cultural destruction, curtailed educational and career opportunities, among many other losses – and not limited to proven instances of physical or sexual abuse. It is displayed prominently in the new History and Memory Centre, and in a symbolically powerful gesture, also displayed on the former Superintendent's enormous desk in the exhibition space. This artefact was retained in the new exhibition to serve as sizeable metaphor of past forms of bureaucratic power that live on in memories, but now seem archaic.

A vitally important contribution was the contracting of exhibition design to a professional artist and designer who was also a former resident of the Ballarat Children's Home in the 1970s. The concepts, content and designs for the exhibition space went through countless iterations, as the needs and ideas of the Working Group were constantly negotiated alongside the needs of the organisation – Cafs – that was to host the ongoing exhibition. Former resident views were routinely prioritised, rather than institutional needs. For example, there was a decision to not feature any Cafs branding or logos on the designs, as it was not intended as an expression of Cafs' corporate messaging, but an extension of the preferences of former residents, as represented through the Working Group.

Another critical innovation came partway through the design and development process, when the project team and Working group articulated the intended audience for the exhibition. While the previous exhibition had been intended for the general public, it was decided that the new space would be aimed at two key audiences: former inmate-residents and their families; and current staff at Cafs. In this way, the histories as written and represented in the History and Memory Centre are not 'assets' for the organisation to sell, but rather a form of recognition of the multiple experiences of institutionalisation, and an investment in future social work practice and staff development.

Cafs has consolidated its approach into a strategy for history and records that can be summarised in one sentence: 'Your histories, our responsibilities' (Cafs 2021). It places ownership of institutional histories with former residents, and the responsibility for responding in the hands of Cafs. It is a simple and transformative concept that has shaped all subsequent historical activities. It recognises that responsibility for the systemic and ongoing failures of institutionalisation sit with the institution, not the individuals who were subjected to those failures.

Cafs' experience, while specific to its own time and place, provides an illustrative example that points towards an adaptable way of considering institutional histories and heritage. It focuses not on the content of histories, but considers the ways in which these histories have been written to approach an integrated view that is able to accommodate organisational and survivor priorities.

Integrating institutional histories

The writing and representation of institutional histories often exemplify an established 'top-down' approach. These histories proliferated in the later part of the twentieth century as many organisations reached significant milestones such as centenaries. Morris's (1965) history of the Ballarat Orphanage described above is a typical example. These were often in-house productions or commissioned with the intent of burnishing organisational reputations, in the pursuit of funding and favour from donors and governments. These institutional histories were often 'self-

congratulatory' (Clendinnen 2006), presenting as Swain, Sheedy and O'Neill have shown 'a rosy view of the past' (Swain, Sheedy, and O'Neill 2012). Often founded with a civic intent, the torchbearers of these organisations' traditions, continued to project the civic and often religious duty that attaches to these histories (Rosser and Swain 2013). There is clearly a need for 'historians, in a post-apology world . . . to find a new way of researching and writing in order to be able to better document the history of out of home "care"' (Swain, Sheedy, and O'Neill 2012, 17–18).

Media coverage of institutional life has been consistent with the self-congratulatory published histories. Until the sexual abuse revelations, the Ballarat Orphanage had been treated very kindly by the media over the years.[16] In 1929, for example, a Melbourne newspaper headlined a claim by the Inspector of Charities that the Ballarat Orphanage was 'the finest in the world' (Argus 19 June 1929). No-one in the media asked the basis for such an exaggerated claim. Likewise, another Melbourne daily reported uncritically Superintendent Ludbrook's assertion at a conference of the Children's Welfare Association in 1944 that 'Institutions had made such strides and progress in the last quarter of a century that their environment was equal to that in the average middle class home' (Age, 2 June 1944).

To this list of official histories are added the countless personal case files that Care leavers access from the archives – not without impediments, such as arbitrary redactions. Many Care leavers are appalled and distressed by what they find in their files. Inaccuracies, misinformation, denigration and hurtful judgements cause them to feel under-valued and misrepresented (Golding 2021). They would support Musgrove who, after extensive research using these case files, concluded that what is found in them is 'distorted reality' and cannot be treated as clear evidence of 'what really happened' (Musgrove 2015, 149). Moreover, it is rare to find the voice of a child anywhere in these documents. Their opinions and feelings were not thought to be worth recording. It is not surprising that many Care leavers reject these 'hostile biographies', much less regard them as authoritative sources on their own lives (Caswell and Robinson-Sweet 2023).

Like the official histories commissioned by developer and City Council to inform heritage within urban development, Ethel Morris's institutional history was fixated on funding and facilities, bricks and mortar. None of these histories of the Ballarat Orphan Asylum, Orphanage and Children's Home contain the stories of the emotionally messy experiences of the thousands of children who lived in that place. These limited histories reflect the official documents, frameworks and records of authorised heritage discourse, and organisational record-keeping. They meet the historical criteria as laid down in heritage laws, and historical conventions of evidence-based. They have not, however, integrated these lived experiences.

In raising the question 'Who owns the past?', Clendinnen had no doubt that history is always owned by the powerful. 'They will create and control the official record, and their point of view will inform the stories which present themselves as no more than innocent 'objective' descriptions of 'what happened' (Clendinnen 2006). Clendinnen was referring to history 'in the grand narrative sense', but there is no reason to think her conclusion does not apply to the history we are discussing here: the interpretation of heritage sites, official histories and media reports.

Mirroring the situation in Ballarat, these official narratives overlap and are overlaid now by the compelling output of Care leavers and survivors themselves, who over the past twenty years have led the emergence of 'bottom-up' versions of institutional histories. These destabilise 'the self-congratulatory accounts of the past', knowing instinctively and through experience that 'the past, like the present, is simply too complicated and too multiple to be told in any single story' (Clendinnen 2006, 66). As Jacqueline Wilson emphasises, via Julia Clarke's writing on cultural heritage (Clark 2002), the work of describing historical and institutional cultures is not about representing an 'illusory' authentic or real perspective on the past, but rather about approaching these perspectives with an 'inclusive integrity – a readiness to present and acknowledge the manifold strands of narrative from both sides of an Us-Other divide' (Wilson 2005, 126).

The sheer volume and consistency of testimony and evidence they have presented to the trilogy of national inquiries held between 1997 and 2004 has changed the public narrative, perhaps

irreversibly. The three inquiries generated more than 1,400 written submissions, most of them survivor testimony, while the Royal Commission took direct personal evidence from thousands of abuse survivors, including Care leavers.

Emboldened by this momentum shift, a remarkable proliferation of memoirs and other personal accounts of childhood experience over the past 20 years. CLAN has a collection of over 150 such publications which collectively serve to disrupt the 'top-down' institutional histories. Rather than avail themselves of opportunity under Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation to seek corrections to their personal files, many Care leavers prefer to construct a counter narrative that tells 'their side of the story' in their own words outside official archives.

Conclusion: shared authority and co-production

Top-down and bottom-up histories should not be seen as competing or mutually exclusive. It is our argument that these historical forms need to come together more deliberately into a negotiated collaboration that combines a mix of records, documents, artefacts and perspectives. Insider knowledge produced by 'those that were there' can no longer be ignored or devalued, but professional expertise continues to hold its value. The concept of shared authority has much to offer (Frisch 1990, 1997). A form of 'co-production' of heritage and history could result in a more integrated form of institutional history, rather than definitive accounts of records-based authority.

These are not just methodological questions for professional historians, but live opportunities and responsibilities for government and community sector practitioners. There are potential operational benefits for organisations who confront their multi-layered histories with honesty and integrity, significantly in relation to staff morale, skills development and retention. In an environment where such histories are indeed common knowledge, an often socially engaged and highly educated workforce is likely to respond positively to genuine attempts to align historical responsibilities with the values of contemporary practice.

Most critically, the role of engaged and empowered former resident-inmates in the gathering, communication and implementation of the histories that belong to them is paramount. This does not mean that the work of researching, planning and organising falls only to them. New heritage, historical and social services professionals need to grasp the nettle of responsibility that has been enabled by the pioneering work of activist-survivors. No doubt this role will continue to evolve and develop, as new narrative identities are uncovered and understood and as new generations of experience and its empathetic representation step forward.

Notes

1. Namely the accommodation of children who are now identified as Stolen Generations and Forgotten Australians, as highlighted in landmark national reports *Bringing Them Home* (1997) and *Forgotten Australians* (2004).
2. There are a number of sources containing direct testimony of former inmates of the Ballarat Orphanage and Ballarat Children's Home. The Victorian 'Betrayal of Trust' (Family and Community Development Committee 2013), and the Commonwealth 'Forgotten Australians' (Committee 2004); the National Library of Australia's 'Forgotten Australians and Child Migrants Oral History Project' contains at least five detailed oral histories of former inmates of these institutions (See National Library of Australia 2012). The independent website 'Stolen Generations Testimonies' contains at least three interviews with Aboriginal former inmates from these institutions (See Stolen Generations Testimonies Foundation 2009). See also (Peart 2005), and (Golding 2005) for first-hand accounts of institutional life in these facilities.
3. See for instance the Royal Commission's Ballarat Case Study in which church leaders repeatedly defend their own knowledge of alarming behaviours with children in the Ballarat Diocese by appealing to a sense of collectivised 'common knowledge' (McClellan, Coate, and Murray 2017, 23, 25, 27, 35, 36, 48, 59, 65).
4. Including one of this article's authors, Frank Golding.
5. The Heritage Council of Victoria (HCV) makes decisions under the Heritage Act 1995 (updated 2017), about what to include in the Register of places and objects which are of significance to the State.

6. It has since been converted into a childcare facility that opened in 2023.
7. Both versions of history – the developer's and the Council's – were used in a series of contested sessions at Ballarat City Council meetings and at the Victorian Civil & Administrative Tribunal in 2013–14.
8. A comprehensive discussion of this issue was presented in (Golding 2016).
9. Including an author of this **article**, David McGinniss, with Ember Parkin.
10. Including an author of this **article**, Frank Golding.
11. Although at the time of publication, progress has been frustratingly slow, and onsite interpretation remains absent.
12. As one of the authors of this article, Frank Golding, did.
13. Other initiatives by Cafs had been welcomed during the 150th anniversary period. In 2016, a new Avenue of Honour was re-planted in the vicinity of an original Avenue of Honour that had originally been planted in 1916 to honour the sacrifices of more than 100 former Ballarat District Orphan Asylum and Ballarat Orphanage inmates who had service in World War I. The PhD project was completed by an author of this article, David McGinniss (McGinniss 2020)
14. At least one of whom – an author of this article, Frank Golding – was not contacted for permission.
15. Which in the light of the new historical approach to the organisation's foundation, was now no longer even the 150th anniversary.
16. Golding has accumulated a database of hundreds of media reports featuring the Ballarat Orphanage, and Cafs' collection similarly includes countless newspaper articles about the Orphan Asylum, Orphanage and Children's Home.

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