Forest Street Archaeology Exhibition
Post Office Gallery, Bendigo

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## Contents

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Design of the Directed Study ............................................................................ 1
   1.2 Original research questions ............................................................................. 2
2 Literature review .......................................................................................................... 3
3 Methodology .................................................................................................................. 7
   3.1 Museum visits .................................................................................................... 7
   3.2 Artefact analysis ................................................................................................. 7
   3.3 Consultations with Heritage Victoria personnel .............................................. 7
   3.4 Literature review ............................................................................................... 8
   3.5 Historical research ............................................................................................ 8
4 Exegesis on writing the catalogue essay ................................................................. 9
   4.1 Aims of the essay ............................................................................................... 9
   4.2 Challenges ......................................................................................................... 9
   4.3 The interpretive process .................................................................................. 10
   4.4 Broadening the context .................................................................................... 11
   4.5 Telling the story ............................................................................................... 11
5 Catalogue essay ........................................................................................................... 13
6 Conclusions .................................................................................................................. 24
7 References ................................................................................................................. 26
   7.1 Literature review ............................................................................................... 26
   7.2 Exegesis on writing the catalogue essay ......................................................... 27
   7.3 Catalogue essay ............................................................................................... 28
8 Appendix ...................................................................................................................... 30
1 Introduction

For around five weeks in 2009, every lunchtime I walked past an excavation going on just down the road from where I worked. I stood on one side of the cyclone wire fence watching the archaeologists working diligently on the other side. Forest Street in Bendigo turned out to be of "considerable significance" to both Bendigo and the state according to the consulting archaeologists’ report (Sterenberg and Ford 2011:135). On completion of the excavation, all the artefacts were packed up and disappeared into the Heritage Victoria warehouse in Melbourne, and the developer constructed a new commercial building on the site.

In 2010 I met Heritage Victoria archaeologist, David Bannear, who is based in Bendigo and had been involved with the project. He is a passionate advocate for getting local stories told locally and his enthusiasm is infectious. When the new building opened earlier this year, the local newspaper published a supplement that included a spread about the "treasures" that had been unearthed. I wrote to the paper suggesting that it was a shame the story wasn't being told here in Bendigo. Less than two weeks later an item appeared in the same newspaper detailing David’s call for a home for the artefacts.

Bendigo does not have a dedicated European history museum (a subject of some interesting debate here), but it does have the Post Office Gallery - a satellite space of the Bendigo Art Gallery - that hosts temporary social history exhibitions. Shortly after I wrote to the paper and David’s call was published, the Art Gallery announced that it was planning an exhibition of archaeology from the Forest Street site. I contacted the curator of the Post Office Gallery, Sandra Bruce, and begged to be involved somehow.

1.1 Design of the Directed Study

The curator suggested an internship, which would involve background research and writing labels for the artefacts to be displayed. For the purpose of this Directed Study, the label text I produced was to be set in a theoretical context. The curator, with the assistance of David Bannear, would design the exhibition and choose the artefacts. Sandra usually writes the catalogue essays that accompany each exhibition. However, as she felt archaeology was outside her field of expertise, she had asked David to write the essay.

As my research progressed, I felt audacious enough to draft the catalogue essay and submit it to David Bannear for comment. The first draft was very well received by David, his colleagues at Heritage Victoria and Sandra. With additional contributions from David, the essay has been adopted for use as the catalogue essay.

While my original research questions and methodology were designed with the preparation of label text in mind, they have informed the drafting of the catalogue essay.
1.2 Original research questions

The original aim of the project was to create label text informed by "best practice" and current theoretical approaches to museum archaeology. The main research question guiding my study was:

- In a museum exhibit, how do you convey a sense of the limitations of archaeological evidence, and the process and reality of interpretation to visitors, while at the same time creating an engaging and satisfying experience?

Subsidiary questions included:
- Does "curatorial authority" or conveying dominant meanings from archaeological evidence matter? If so why?
- What is it that visitors expect from a museum display?
- How do you address these concerns in practice?

I was particularly concerned about issues of reflexivity, curatorial "honesty", construction of the past and the responsibility and remit of museums. In addition, I was interested in visitors’ competence and experience in "reading" displays and how museums must take that into account.

The literature review was based on these questions.
2 Literature review

Museums profess to tell stories; stories about social and natural history. Objects usually form the basis or at least a large part of those stories. In the case of stories told using archaeological artefacts, those objects are often the “small things forgotten” (Deetz 1977). But the telling of such stories using such objects is problematic on a number of levels. While text is commonly employed in the form of labels and information boards, and rarely questioned, does it constitute a story? What is a story? What story do archaeologists and curators choose to tell and how do they tell it? Museologists and archaeologists are grappling with the ethical, philosophical and political aspects of museum storytelling. The following review explores the challenges inherent in telling a story with objects in a museum, the wider political factors involved in public storytelling and the different approaches taken by curators to try and meet those challenges.

What is a story?

Stories resist definition; we generally recognise a story when we see or hear one, but tying a story to definitive criteria has proven difficult (Leitch 1986). However, some of the attributes of story are recognisable and three are most pertinent to the interpretation of archaeology in a museum setting (Leitch 1986:25-26):

- a story is a narrative worth telling
- it can only exist as a transaction with an audience, and
- the audience needs to understand the type of discourse employed by the storyteller in order to make sense of the story.

Leitch distinguishes between narrative and story, and asserts that, if a narrative is not worth the telling, it is not a story. Relevance, then, may be key to the success of a museum “story”. Story enables a museum to connect to a non-specialist audience more easily by personalising bare facts (Swain 2007:10). Story can also explore social relations in a way that artefactual analysis cannot (Gibb 2000:6).

All of which implies an audience: to whom is the story relevant? A story simply does not exist without an audience to hear, see or read it, and the audience brings its own interpretation to a story. The telling of a story is a “transaction” rather than the delivery of a one-way “message” (Leitch 1986), but the audience needs to understand the conventions of the story’s form. Leitch (1986:34) describes such competence as “narrativity” and states that it is learned in childhood; others call it “cultural competence” (Stam 2005:58). Lack of familiarity with the curators’ storytelling mode might explain why, in the UK, older people are less likely to visit museums because they were unfamiliar with them when growing up (Swain 2007:200) and why the National Museum of the American Indian, for example, proved so challenging for some visitors when it opened (Cobb 2005; Smith 2005). Displays eschewed labels, were based on Indigenous rather than Western curatorial systems of classification (Smith 2005:429 & 431) and employed a “spider web”, rather than linear layout (Cobb 2005:503). Critics deplored the lack of “‘scholarship’ or ‘crisp lessons’” in the exhibits (Cobb 2005:502). While Cobb discusses the
critiques from the point of view of whose voice is being heard (Indigenous versus Western curatorial), she observes that:

Clearly all three of these critics began their critiques from the assumptions ... that exhibitions must meet the standards of discrete disciplines and must teach crisp, cleanly labelled lessons – assumptions that are based on years of experience with Western museums and academic disciplines (2005: 502-503).

In other words, the critics she quotes were familiar with a certain mode of museum storytelling and could not “read” a museum story that employed different methods. Recognising this, Cobb advocates that the museum itself needs to “prepare visitors for what they will experience, letting them know that they will be asked to ‘read’ differently and asking them to rise to the occasion” (2005:505).

What story to tell?

Even when storyteller and audience in a museum setting share a discourse or storytelling mode, what story is to be told? Launius says that visitors will connect most readily with stories that resonate with their personal experience and that of family and close associates. Beyond that “events, epochs and themes discussed throughout the broad expanse of history have essentially an equal importance” (Launius 2007:23-24). Swain (2007:270) agrees.

[M]embers of the public feel more excited about a find that more attached they are to it. And this attachment comes form their nearness in space and time. Being shown a relatively unimportant find that was found on their street yesterday becomes as important as a famous ancient treasure found hundreds of years ago in another country.

So archaeology deals with the past, but which past? There is no monolithic past waiting to be uncovered and analysed “scientifically”(Bender 1995; Shanks and Tilley 1992). Instead, archaeologists, museum curators and historians create the past to serve a range of contemporary human interests (Gagnon 1982:26; Holtorf 2005:6; Shanks and Tilley 1992:14, 25). For Holtorf (2005:60) archaeological artefacts have no intrinsic meaning – meaning is rather created by those presenting them and again by those viewing them - and there is no direct correlation between the relationship of objects and a story of the past (Geertz 1973:17; Shanks and Tilley 1992:13).

Objects in a museum are far removed from their original social and physical contexts. Simply by dint of displaying it in a glass cabinet in a museum, a metal thimble morphs from a discarded or lost utilitarian sewing tool into a representative of the past. Not only that, it is now far distant from its companions in the privy—which might say as much about the original life of the thimble as the thimble itself—so it must represent that past in the absence of those material relationships. And it is certainly far distant from the woman who originally used it. As Swain (2007:214) puts it, the museum is “false and unreal”. The archaeologist and museum curator must therefore be acutely aware of their own situated position (politically and within an intellectual process) when deciding what story to tell of a site and of the
fact that they are producing new meaning for the objects (Holterf 2005; Joyce 2006; Shanks and Tilley 1992).

While archaeologists and curators may be aware of the own situation, they do not operate in a political vacuum. Launius (2007:20) observes that the Smithsonian Institution has been “cowed” through a number of encounters with the political right in what he describes as “cultural war”. As a result the curators “seem increasingly to constrain themselves to presenting material that will not arouse controversy. A subtext of consensus history, a one-nation, one-people perspective, predominates” (Launius 2007: 22).

How to tell the story?

Telling a story of the past in a museum, then, is a postmodern dilemma with a moral and political dimension. How then do you convey the nature of the different data archaeological evidence brings to the study of the past, its inherent limitations (Joyce 2006, Skeates 2002) and the reality of the creation of that past by archaeologists and curators? Do you even try when your audience is as likely to be visiting the museum for entertainment as edification (Hudson 1977:1) and expects some certainty from the professionals telling the story (Swain 2007:214)? How do you tap into the “concern for local and personal history” that Launius (2007: 23) says is “routinely expressed by visitors at the Smithsonian Institution”?

Some curators have attempted to do this by making themselves visible – attributing text and labels to the people who wrote them (Shanks and Tilley 1992:97; Swain 2007:216), thus challenging the notion of the objective curatorial voice. Others have posited more than one interpretation of the data and asked visitors to decide (Skeates 2002:209), challenging the notion of an unquestioned version of the past (Swain 2007:244). Speaking particularly of the “People before London” exhibit, Skeates says that “summative evaluation, anecdotal evidence and person observation indicate[e] that most visitors seem to have appreciated their approach” (Skeates 2002:214) Published critics did not responded positively to this or examples discussed by Swain. Saville, for example, attacks what he calls “extremes of postmodernism” and sees them as “undermining core museological values (1999 cited in Swain 2007: 49). In an attempt to demonstrate that there are many possible pasts beyond the linear narrative constructed by archaeologists, Bender (1995) collected views of the “meaning” of Stonehenge from a range of groups and then provided visitors with the means to leave their own comments. In three years visitors left around 400 comments (Bender 1995:57) suggesting that, if nothing else, they welcomed the opportunity to have their say.

Bender’s approach is perhaps the most explicit example of the transactional nature of storytelling in the context of displays of history. Leitch (1986:123) asserts that a good storyteller leaves gaps for the audience to fill in; this is what keeps them engaged. Likewise, Geertz (1973:20) states that we do not have to know everything about a subject in order to understand it. This is something curators seem to struggle with: how much interpretation do you need to provide and how much do you leave to the audience to work out for themselves? George describes his
reaction to an unnamed exhibition: “...I felt demeaned, as if I had been led by the nose through a canned presentation of slickly packaged pap. I felt I had been made to read a history textbook...” (George cited in Stam 2005:63). In order to avoid such overworking Grey et al (2006:33) advise that “[t]he voice(s) you use need not know everything. They could leave room for investigation and exploration, or room for the audience to draw their own conclusions”.

The use of multiple voices (multi-vocality) and the interweaving of fictional and historical voices has been explored in the context of writing about archaeology (Joyce et al 2002; Joyce 2006; Little 2000; Majewski 2000; McKee 2000; Praetzelis 1998; Praetzelis et al 1998; Schrire 1995; Yamin 2002) to create what Joyce (2006:57) calls “the stratified language” of the time and place being represented. Harking back to the notion of many pasts, no single story, she says, can adequately account for the past being studied (Joyce 2006:49).

Museologists as much as archaeologists and anthropologists are struggling with the power issues inherent in “representation” (e.g. Geertz 1973; Pieterse 2005), whether those being represented are pre-contact Indigenous peoples or the working poor of a nineteenth century city. While museologists and archaeologists continue to experiment with how to tell stories, George (cited in Stam 2005:63) questions the whole enterprise. A museum should ask itself not ‘What story do we want to tell?’, but rather ‘What questions do we want to raise?’. 
3 Methodology

The research methodology I employed was based on preparation for the original task of writing artefact labels. It included museum visits, artefact analysis, consultations with Heritage Victoria personnel, a literature review of similar excavations and limited historical research. The data I gathered gave me the confidence and the material to draft the catalogue essay.

3.1 Museum visits

I visited a number of museums (and drew on notes from a museum visit last year) to learn how different institutions design and present exhibits. Archaeological artefacts usually form part of other larger exhibits; however as most museum displays are object-based, it was still valuable experience. These are the museums visited in the last 12 months:

- Museum of South Australia (October 2010)
- Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharoahs, Melbourne Museum (April 2011)
- Melbourne Museum (May - June 2011)
- Immigration Museum Melbourne (July 2011)
- National Museum of Australia (August 2011)
- Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (August 2011)

3.2 Artefact analysis

I spent two sessions in the Heritage Victoria laboratory in Collingwood (Melbourne) familiarising myself with and photographing the artefacts that had been selected as possible inclusions in the exhibit. The Heritage Victoria Curatorial Officer gave me copies of preliminary artefact database prepared by archaeologists who conducted the excavation and the revised database of exhibition artefacts that she had prepared. I added my photographs of the artefacts to the revised database. I also had a copy of the site report to assist.

Though there were about twice as many artefacts selected and recatalogued as can be used in the exhibition, they did give me a good sense of the extent of the assemblage and the nature of the artefacts recovered. This first hand familiarity with the artefacts proved extremely helpful in preparing the catalogue essay.

3.3 Consultations with Heritage Victoria personnel

I have consulted with three people involved with the excavation or care of the assemblage.

- I met and corresponded with Heritage Victoria archaeologist, David Bannear, on a number of occasions.
- The Curatorial Officer at the Heritage Victoria laboratory, Annie Muir, was generous with her time and expertise during both my visits.
• I visited the ceramics consultant on Forest Street excavation, Dennis O’Hoy, whose insights into the early history of Bendigo set the direction of my subsequent reading and the shape of the catalogue essay.

3.4 Literature review
I read as widely as I could on historical archaeology, especially in Australia, to gain an understanding of how to go about making sense of the assemblage. Given the time available, it was necessarily a brief review.

3.5 Historical research
The consultant archaeologists, DIG International, had employed a historian to research the historical background of the site. However, the historical summary she wrote (Sterenberg and Ford 2011:5-13) did not cover issues about which I had questions as I familiarised myself with the assemblage and site report. Both an independent critic and Bendigo Post Office Gallery curator, Sandra Bruce, raised other questions after reading the first draft of the catalogue essay. This prompted a short period of historical research in the Goldfields Research Centre and readings in local history to gain background on Bendigo’s water supply, sanitation/sewerage arrangements, the names of tenants not listed in the historian’s summary and the sorts of businesses operating in the neighbourhood of the site.
4 Exegesis on writing the catalogue essay

4.1 Aims of the essay

The catalogue essay will accompany an exhibition of artefacts from the 2009 excavation of a site in Forest Street, Bendigo. The site is not one of national significance. The archaeological consultants who conducted the excavation state that the data is of “considerable significance to Bendigo” and the artefact collection “of significance to the state [of Victoria]” (Sterenberg & Ford 2010:135). According to Swain (2007:270) “members of the public feel more excited about a find the more attached they are to it. And this attachment comes from their nearness in time and space”. The Heritage Victoria archaeologist assisting with the exhibition certainly considered that the main audience will be Bendigo residents.

The Bendigo Post Office Gallery curator wanted the exhibition to tell both the “story” of the site and show how archaeology revealed that story. Those two stipulations determined the shape of the catalogue essay. A comment made by the Heritage Victoria Curatorial Officer, Anne-Louise Muir, when I visited the laboratory also influenced the essay. “Archaeology should not be used to just illustrate history,” she said. “It can tell us things that history can’t.”

One of the things it can tell us is “the context and conditions of a [cultural artefact’s] production and appropriation (Shanks and Tilley 1992:15). As Swain (2007:9) points out, the problem with museum exhibits is that the artefacts have been removed from their original context and replaced with something entirely foreign to the context in which those artefacts were made and used: the display case. The catalogue essay provided an opportunity to re-establish a sense of the original context as archaeological data and before that as material culture. In doing this I was influenced by archaeologist/writers such as Lawrence (2000), Praetzellis et al (1997), Praetzellis and Praetzellis (1998), Schrire (1995) and Spector (1991). I deliberately set out to emulate them.

4.2 Challenges

Unlike the writers I sought to emulate, I had not worked on the excavation I was writing about and faced a number of challenges in interpreting it.

The site report and the artefacts database were my primary sources of data. Apparently the report was presented in six volumes, of which the main (written) report and the database were only two. I did not have access to the context and feature sheets; register of levels, plans and photos; site plans or DVD containing photographs of the excavation. I found it difficult, therefore, to locate on the site contexts and features referred to in the report.

The site report (Sterenberg and Ford 2011) provided a good historical background, and summary of the findings, but the summary was too brief to provide me enough
material for the essay. The technical report section of the site report, while thorough, was dense and difficult to understand.

The artefacts database prepared by the consulting archaeologists was only a preliminary (and not very thorough) analysis. When the exhibition was first mooted, the Heritage Victoria Curatorial Officer pulled from the assemblage a sub-collection of items that would be suitable for display. She re-catalogued all those items and sent me both databases. As my original task had been to write exhibition labels for the objects, I spent two sessions at the Heritage Victoria laboratory familiarising myself with those objects and the second database. It quickly became obvious that it was only part of the story. So I had to work across the two databases, the original much less carefully prepared than the second and detailing objects I had not seen and of which there were no photographs.

Finally, the exhibition’s theme had been decided early by the curator of the Bendigo Post Office Gallery. While many interesting themes arose in course of analysing the data I had access to, the framework of the catalogue essay and the exhibit itself had been determined by the exhibition brief.

4.3 The interpretive process

Writing archaeology, especially for a non-specialist audience, is very much the interpretive process. As a process, it must be founded in the data; the artefacts and features uncovered during the excavation must be the basis of the story even if it also refers to data from other archaeological sites. But artefacts in themselves mean nothing. “Meaning is produced in the material practice of reasoning in the present, which is, of course, in no way identical with the past” (Shanks and Tilley 1992:76).

I was very conscious that I was creating meaning from the archaeological and historical data to which I had access, but originally forgot that a reader was not. An independent critic of the first draft asked again and again the basis of my interpretation.

— How do you know they used Worcestershire Sauce?
— How do you know the chamber pot was part of a set?
— How do you know the perfume bottles belonged to a person in that house?

— Because all the artefacts were found on the site and located near each of those houses, I answered.

— But you don’t tell me that, she replied.

So I was also concerned that a reader understood both how what they were reading had been produced and that it did not represent the whole “truth” of the site. (That is why I titled that section One, not The, story of Forest Street. At the same time, I did not want to bore them with the theoretical underpinnings of my position.

Finally, I was painfully aware of my status as a student and novice interpreter with
far less experience than the Heritage Victoria archaeologist who had worked on the excavation and was now advising the art gallery curator on the exhibition. There was every possibility that I would “get it wrong”.

The shape of the essay aims to walk the reader through the historical background and what was found by the archaeologists. It then explains how I made sense of the two before proceeding to the interpretation itself. Perhaps if I had been completely honest to my theoretical leanings I would have positioned myself and my doubts more explicitly in the essay. But I was not confident that such a radical departure from the authoritative curatorial voice would be welcome.

4.4 Broadening the context

The archaeological report necessarily focused exclusively on the site. Stepping outside the confines of the archaeological site and the site-specific historical background was necessary to make sense of some of the data. While the interpretation must be based on the site data, it helped to know what you would have seen if you looked over the street or how the sanitary arrangements of Bendigo changed from cesspits to night cart services quite early in the life of the city or how the residents obtained water. In this way I discovered another boarding house further up Forest Street and the names of some of the residents who had lived on the site, as well as a second livery stable and an ironmonger on the other side of the road. The presence of these last two businesses gave me the confidence to declare that a blacksmith or farrier ran a workshop on the site. Even though there was no specific mention of it in the summary or the historical background, buried in the technical section of the report was a description of the type of waste produced by a blacksmith. So the noise and smell of a blacksmith’s shop did find a place in the essay.

4.5 Telling the story

In writing the story I had to use the exhibition brief as a framework, but I drew on short story and journalistic feature writing techniques. A good feature article launches the reader straight into an anecdote that captures the essence of the subject of the article.

The classic structure of the typical feature article is:

• begin with an anecdote (to buttonhole the reader)
• follow this with a statement of your theme
• illustrate your theme with some facts and quotes
• brighten it with an anecdote or two
• illustrate with more facts and quotes
• brighten with another anecdote or two
• conclude (Dunlevy 1988:5).

The little boy playing on carpeted stairs was the “anecdote” that I used to “buttonhole the reader”. I wanted to throw the reader straight into the Forest Street revealed through the archaeological data, as you would also do in a short
story. I wanted them to know that this would not be a dry description of artefacts, but a sensory trip into a past suggested by those artefacts.

Shanks and Tilley (1992: 14) assert that “there is no simple direct route from objects and their relationships to conventional narrative history”. My anecdotes were gained from “interviewing” the data; but they do not, and are not intended to, give a lineal narrative of the site. Instead, I tried to give the reader a “feel” for the site. Joyce (2006:63) describes experimental writing in historical archaeology that juxtaposes multiple times and spaces:

   Such place-based non-causal narratives, often in the form of what Rebecca Yamin (1998a) calls ‘vignettes’, communicate a sense of the fragmentary nature of archaeological understanding while representing the density of detail available for individual intervals of time.

Swain (2007:10) states that the obvious way to help visitors to an exhibition connect with archaeology is by telling them stories of people. The same is true of writing about archaeology. Bringing people into the narrative requires an imaginative leap that takes the writer beyond straight description of artefacts. Gibb (2000:3) suggests that, as well as holding great promise for engaging non-specialist audiences, interpretive historical fiction “can provide a powerful analytical tool, an explicitly subjective but rigorous means of exploring archaeological and archival data”:

   Storytelling is a form of experimentation and analysis in which the storyteller-analyst examines certain conditions while holding others constant, determining how the actors might have behaved. Insights derived from such tales may have testable implications (Gibb 2000:6)

I would not suggest that my first attempt at such interpretation provides testable implications, but I certainly hope that it stands as a worthy example of how to engage a non-specialist audience.
5 Catalogue essay

The text of the catalogue essay follows. Captions for illustrations that accompany the text are included in appendix Error! Reference source not found..

While I determined the shape and structure of the document, part of the text was contributed by Heritage Victoria archaeologist, David Bannear; this is denoted in a blue font. The formatting of the endnotes follows the requirements of the Bendigo Art Gallery.
Hidden Worlds: glimpses from Bendigo’s Forest Street archaeological excavation

One afternoon in the late nineteenth century, a small boy sat on the carpeted stairs to the basement of his home in Forest Street playing at race horses. Perhaps he was trying to escape his sisters who wanted him to play at tea. Perhaps it was simply raining. In any event, it was a sad day for him because somehow he lost one of his horses. Along with the stairs, the tiny metal horse survived the later demolition of the house until an archaeologist found it years later.

We’ll never know the little boy’s name, but we know he lived and played there because his lost toy bears witness to his presence. It is just this sort of glimpse into the private lives of the citizens whose names are not recorded in the Annals of Bendigo that archaeology can give us. In the broken cups, plates and bottles we can see fragments of lives that were never documented.

Recovering heritage

For five weeks in 2009, passers-by in Forest Street could stand on one side of a cyclone wire fence and watch a team of archaeologists scraping away 150 years of Bendigo’s history on the other. This scene was being played out because the Victorian Heritage Act (1995) protects archaeological sites and relics. Administered by Heritage Victoria, the Act requires developers, where necessary, to fund archaeological excavations to document and recover evidence of the early settlement of Victoria. Forming the western edge of the original central business district of Bendigo (formerly Sandhurst), Forest Street has been intensively occupied since the gold rush. Heritage Victoria considered that archaeology was necessary because the building site was likely to yield a wealth of buried archaeological evidence. In addition, the construction of a sub surface car park meant there would be substantial destruction of archaeological deposits. Research showed that the archaeological evidence would comprise the foundations of masonry and timber buildings, laneways, and artefacts (such as crockery, bottles, jewellery, toys and food scraps) associated with the people who had once been lived and worked there.

The archaeologists carefully dug away the layers of soil and rubble that had accumulated over many decades, beginning with the most recent layers - those on the top - and working through to the oldest - those lower down. This stratigraphical approach (also called relative dating) enables archaeologists to attribute artefacts to their correct time periods. Archaeological excavation is done in conjunction with detailed site-mapping so that recovered artefacts can be linked to the exact locations where they were used, lost or discarded. Through these methods of digging and recording, archaeologists can ultimately build up an accurate picture of how people lived and how daily life changed as Bendigo evolved from a gold rush town to a great city.

Scouring the pages of history

To help the archaeologists to decide how best to carry out their investigations, particularly dealing with the discovery of a complex sequence of building foundations, a historian was
employed to undertake the research necessary to build a picture of how the site developed over time – where buildings had been located and how they were constructed, used, altered and demolished.

The research involved visiting different repositories for historical documents (for example, the State Library of Victoria, Land Information Centre, Public Records Office of Victoria, and North Central Goldfields Regional Library) to plough through a range of different documents including genealogy information and maps; certificates of title, clerks’ notes, and Crown Land grants; probate records; and Municipal Directories and rates books. Of particular value was a 1935 fire insurance survey that showed the type of structures and their location upon the site.

The historical research showed that the land had been used for both residential and business life from as early as 1856 during the gold rush era to the present day. When it was officially subdivided it was terraced and comprised three Crown Land allotments: 10 (lower terrace), 11 (middle terrace) and 12 (upper terrace), Forest Street, Sandhurst.

Lower terrace: hotel accommodation, stables, boarding house

Allotment 10 had two quite different business streams: one revolving around hotel and accommodation life and the other stabling horses. The Royal Hotel was operating on the block from the early 1860s with Amelia Turner one of its early proprietors. The hotel’s bar entrance was on High Street and those seeking accommodation entered through Forest Street. After Amelia Turner there was a succession of hotel keepers including Edwin Garnett; William Pallett and later Pallett’s widow Sophia who ran the hotel from 1888 to the early 1900s. The hotel became a boarding house in 1920 run by Ruth Anderson and survived as a business until the 1950s. The boarding house was described in 1956 as “a two-storey brick and stone building containing fifteen rooms, two bathrooms and laundry”.¹

The livery stables also had a number of proprietors. The original business was associated with Amelia Turner, who from the 1870s progressively leased it to John Edward Featherstone, James Crowley, and William and Euphemia Toomer. By 1916 the western part of the stables had been demolished and a shop was built for Miller & Company, Machinery Merchants. This company remained the occupant of the building through to the mid 1950s. Probate records for the property’s owner in 1956 described it as “a brick office and yard (with floor) with galvanised iron roof … Old stone and brick stables are erected along the rear boundary of the property”.²

Middle terrace: houses, warehouse, church, garage, wrecking business

Rate book entries show that Allotment 11 contained a house in 1856 that was occupied by John Gardner (also spelt Gardiner). By 1865, Gardner’s widow, Fanny, is listed as the owner and the allotment contained two houses and a workshop. By the late 1880s all the buildings had been demolished and a warehouse built, which was used until 1924 by various importers and manufacturers’ agents. After 1924 the building was used as a Pentecostal
Church until the mid 1950s. From around 1961 the building was a motor garage and then became a wrecking business which is still remembered by local residents.

**Upper terrace: houses, boarding house**

Allotment 12 was occupied by at least 1860 and contained two early houses; the land remained under the ownership of James Boyd and his family until the 1920s. Around 1900 the two houses were combined into a single large property for use as a boarding house. A series of female boarding-house keepers are recorded as the ratepayer between 1904 and 1912. In 1916 the house was unoccupied and then purchased by Elizabeth Harney who returned it to a private dwelling in the 1920s. Upon Harney’s death in 1954, probate described the physical improvements: “nine‐roomed brick house of very old type built on to street frontage and in poor state of repair, requiring a new iron roof”. ³

**Unearthing ghosts**

By 2007 two car parks and a now empty warehouse occupied much of the site. Open air car parks have one archaeologically friendly feature: they have no foundations. Simply level the site, cover it in gravel or asphalt and start parking cars. The car parks effectively sealed the story of the site at the time the last building was demolished. ⁴ Likewise, the warehouse had no load-bearing internal walls, so its history was sealed under a concrete floor. The archaeological evidence concealed beneath these surfaces revealed much more about the site and its changing uses than could be gleaned from rate books and municipal directories alone, including at least one business that is not referred to in the documents.

The Jaara people occupied the region before European settlement, but the archaeologists found no material evidence of an Aboriginal presence at Forest Street, most likely because any such evidence had been destroyed through later activity on the site. Extensive tree root systems were found indicating that the hillside was originally covered by trees and a small silted‐up water course that ran down the hill to join the Bendigo Creek at the bottom of the site. When the gold rush started, the top of the hill seems to have been a tent camp, while holes dug for wooden posts and barrels indicated early divisions of the land. Further down the hill were the remains of a small timber dwelling with slate hearth and a chimney. There was also a series of rectangular pits, several with timber lining and bases, whose purpose is a mystery, as well as a four‐metre deep mine shaft. The miners hit bedrock, and sometime after it was abandoned the shaft was back‐filled. When the site was formally subdivided the three terraces were cut into the slope.

The combination of an earlier natural water course and subsidence in the mine shaft fill seems to have caused ongoing drainage problems for later builders. The house on the upper terrace incorporated a large basement with a timber floor overlying a cement lined drain that ran out to Forest Street. The concrete floor of the warehouse on the middle terrace overlay a section of early Bendigo Pottery ceramic drain. And on the lower terrace, the basement of the hotel accommodation incorporated a large metal grate and drain.

The excavation uncovered details of the construction of the various buildings on the site, revealing a laneway at the back of the terraces which would have provided access to the various workshops situated there, a section of cobbled floor from the livery stables and
foundations and walls of neatly cut, new sandstone blocks. On the middle terrace several layers of clinker and smelting waste (by-products of blacksmithing) were found which included fragments of burnt brick, corroded metal and a hand-manufactured 16.5 inch (42 cm) coach bolt. Back on the upper terrace, some of the stairs leading to the basement still had brass carpet rods attached. Out the back two brick cesspits were uncovered with a trail of charcoal ash leading to the back door of the house, suggesting an attempt to keep the smell down. Another brick cesspit was uncovered on the middle terrace. The cesspits seem to have been emptied regularly as they retained no evidence of effluent. At some stage the householders stopped using them when a night cart system was introduced to the town. The cesspits were then backfilled with household refuse, thus becoming among the most artefact-rich locations on the site.

Rubbish is a feature of all periods of the site. The first residents, the miners, simply dumped their bottles and animal bones near their living quarters, leaving behind evidence of what they drank and ate, and what they drank and ate from: beer and salad oil bottles, fragments of ceramic plates and tea cups. A small shoe belonging to a woman or child also hints that it wasn’t just male miners living on the site. The privies (or cesspits) provide a snapshot of the later households when the residents were using them as rubbish dumps. The hotel accommodation also featured at least one cesspit and it too was a rich source of artefacts. Rubbish was also found under stairs, items were dropped and lost in workshops, and debris was buried in the ongoing process of demolishing and reconstructing buildings.  

Making sense of the data

Once the archaeologists had finished their work, builders moved in to construct a new office complex for the site’s owners, which was officially opened in March 2011. The archaeologists collated all of their data into a report and deposited the artefacts into the care of Heritage Victoria.

Transforming the data into the story of a site is an interpretive process that is a combination of science and imagination. It must be based on what was found: only the artefacts recovered from the site and the recorded features should find a place in the story. On a site such as Forest Street, documented history can help make sense of what was found, as can published discussions about how other archaeologists have interpreted similar sites. Archaeology is in actuality about people rather than objects. Who were the people who lived and worked on the site; people now long gone, but who were close enough to the manic activity of the gold rush to remember it? A good dose of historical imagination helps turn questions about how an object might have been used, who used it and what it meant to them into a story, even if we will never know their names.

A little metal horse was found on the upper terrace under the remains of stairs that were once carpeted. It is quite possible that the boy who lived there played on the stairs and the horse fell through a crack. It is also possible it got there through quite a different sequence of events. Any interpretation of a site is just that: an interpretation. New thinking in the field of archaeology might change how the data is interpreted; someone else may see different connections between the data. But every story builds our understanding of the people who left those traces behind.
Telling one story of Forest Street

A respectable household

In the ideal world of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the place for a respectable woman was in her home. The reality was that many women found themselves in need of an income to support themselves or a family and their options were severely limited. Across Australia, boarding houses were home to both single people and families who could not afford to rent, much less buy their own house. More often than not, a woman ran the boarding house; it was a socially acceptable way for her to earn a living as it was seen as an expansion of her work in the home. When Mrs Bessie Hayes operated the house on the top terrace as a boarding house in 1907 it was one of two in Forest Street and 44 in Bendigo. All but two were run by women, and of those 38 were designated “Mrs”.

By then Bendigo households had been connected to a water supply for nearly 40 years, but a reticulated sewerage system was still 30 years away. It was a long walk through the backyard in the dark to relieve yourself at night, so chamber pots were familiar company in the bedroom. Every morning someone had the unenviable task of emptying the pots into the privy or pan toilet, which may itself have only been emptied once a week. To keep down the inevitable smell, ash from the stove firebox was carried down to the toilet, leaving a tell-tale trail from the back door of the house down the yard.

Four chamber pots were recovered from the top terrace; only one was undecorated. Two must have been part of matching sets as a wash bowl in the same marble pattern was also found. Given their relatively humble station in life, that the householder chose decorated chamber pots and matching sets that included wash bowls and perhaps jugs suggests that she took care shopping for her furnishings and pride in her house. We can’t yet be sure whether the items in the top terrace privy belonged to the boarding house operators and residents, or the tenants who occupied the houses before them. But for a boarding house keeper, her house was at the same time her business premises and her home. Keeping a respectable house would have been good business practice. Even the tenants who preceded them would have been conscious that they were being judged socially on the public spaces in their home.

If you had visited them for tea it would have been served in matching cups and saucers in a sitting room graced by china figurines. Since ceramics dealers in the Victorian colony imported only the finest china and the best kind of earthenware from England, you would have been drinking from the best British tea wares available. While Chinese porcelain makes up a good portion of the ceramics found in sites around Sydney and it was certainly used by earlier mining residents in Bendigo, it does not show up later in Forest Street. The householders here seem to have done their shopping with the grocers and department stores in Pall Mall rather than the Chinese traders in Bridge Street. It may be because Pall Mall was closer, or it may have been social strictures that prevented European women from shopping with the Chinese traders in Bridge Street. Even so, while the Pall Mall traders provided a dazzling array of choices, some items found in the privy pre-date the settlement of Bendigo. For example, if your tea was poured from a lustre finished teapot, you might have guessed this was a treasured item brought from England with the family.
The best china for dinner

Just down the street at the hotel accommodation, a cup of tea was not such an event.20 The thirsty guests seem to have preferred ginger beer, aerated water, beer, wine and even champagne. Many of these beverages would have been produced in Bendigo which boasted breweries and a thriving wine industry.21 In the dining room you would not have found the cheap creamware ceramics that were the equivalent of today’s commercial white ceramics.22 Instead, as a guest of the Royal Hotel, your meals would have been served from matching grey Rhine patterned platters. While Worcestershire sauce, Club sauce and other condiments added piquancy to the boiled or roast meat, you might even have been treated to curried oysters brought up from Melbourne by train.23 Over the years, the plates and bowls from which you dined featured decorative prints in purple, brown and green. Perhaps you were served dessert from moulded glass bowls, and your drinks would certainly have been served in matching glass tumblers.

Like the housekeeper a couple of doors up on the top terrace, the hotelier’s choice in dining and glassware speaks of a concern to present the hotel accommodation as a respectable establishment. Perhaps Amelia Turner, hotelkeeper from at least 1866, chose some of them.24 If that is the case, her hotel lodging must have had a good reputation, and she certainly did well enough from her business endeavours to acquire the two houses on the lot next door in 1879.25

Business is business

The lower end of Forest Street would not have been a quiet place to live with noisy, smelly businesses operating right next door to residences. The livery stables behind the Royal Hotel operated for more than 50 years hiring out horses and taking care of other people’s. You would have heard the whinnying of horses and the clatter of hooves on the laneway and cobbled stable floor, and smelled fresh manure and old straw. Perhaps you would also have heard the stable hands soothing the animals as they treated injuries with Rows Embrocation or Farmer’s Friend.

Across the street was another livery stable, so there would have been horses coming and going all day, and on the corner opposite the Royal Hotel, Connelly and Co Ironmongers had set up business by 1907.26 Perhaps they had been there long enough to supply the blacksmith or farrier who occupied one of the workshops behind the houses on the middle terrace. With two livery stables at that end of the street, it must have been a busy shop: ringing hammer blows and screech of filing, the hiss of hot metal being cooled in a water barrel, horses clopping down the access lane, the smell of hot iron. In the yards between the workshops the waste fuel and slag was tossed out from the forge.

When the houses and workshops on the middle terrace were demolished by 1888, they were replaced by another commercial operation. Five warehouseman and importers/manufacturers’ agents set up shop. This would have added to the already constant traffic, initially horse drawn and perhaps later, motorised. It may well have come as a relief when the warehouse was converted into a church in the mid 1920s.27
A battle with dirt
The people who lived on the middle terrace before the warehouse was built did not leave many traces. Fanny Gardner (whose husband John died sometime before 1865) had lived there since the mid 1850s. The chemist George Dorman seems to have been a tenant in 1872. It is possible that when the houses were demolished to make way for a new hall in the early 1890s, the process destroyed most of the clues they may have left. 28 Certainly at least one woman who was fond of and could afford to buy perfume lived there. Perfume may have been an indulgence, or she may have thought it a necessity in a city chronically short of water.

Until connection to the reticulated water supply became compulsory after 1865, people sourced their domestic water from a range of places. Those who could afford it bought water from water carts – originally filled from small mining dams or abandoned mine shafts, later from standpipes scattered around the town including one in Forest Street. Those who could not sourced water wherever they could find it: in the run-off from roofs, or in puddles and water courses polluted by puddling sludge and human waste. 29 Mining activity took place right in the town until the early twentieth century and in the late 1870s Bendigo Creek was clogged with human and animal excrement and the waste from slaughter yards. 30 The smell, especially in summer, was overwhelming and diphtheria, dysentery, typhoid and diarrhoea raged through the town. 31 The residents at the bottom of Forest Street lived only 50 metres from the creek and would not have been able to escape the smell.

In 1865, there was such a shortage of water all over Bendigo that puddling mills and crushing machines could not operate and thousands of miners were out of work. 32 Things were so desperate by the end of that year the Victorian Railways started bringing trainloads of twelve 400-gallon wrought-iron water tanks to Bendigo. 33 Daily ablutions were largely dispensed with and clothes worn long after they should have been in the washtub, observed one resident. 34 “Then we were among the ‘great unwashed’,” wrote another of the mid-nineteenth century. 35 The roads were unpaved, and much later the artist Ola Cohn remembered the dust of her childhood: “The north wind blew the sand from the mine mullock heaps, causing clouds of dust, and whirlwinds danced a ferocious waltz through the streets.” 36 Keeping clean under these conditions was both a challenge and a health imperative.

The residents of Forest Street tried to treat a range of ailments with jars of ointments, now unlabelled, and bottles of proprietary medicine from Dr James Boyd of View Point Sandhurst. 37 Someone obviously thought Holloway’s ointment, which claimed to cure everything from inveterate ulcers and sore heads to rheumatism, was worth trying at least once. Perhaps George Dorman the chemist sometimes worked at home, as glass tubes reminiscent of pipettes were found in the privy on the middle terrace. Infrequent bathing also seemed to cause problems with hair, given the number of nit combs and bottles of hair tonic recovered from the site. But the residents did keep their teeth clean, with cherry flavoured tooth paste and breath-freshening tonics.
**Kids on the block**

Whether the children could be convinced to clean their teeth each night is unknown. That there were children is certain. As well as children’s shoes, a remarkable number of toys were present on the upper terrace. The girls had miniature tea sets and porcelain dolls to play with; the boys had marbles and metal horses, known as horse flats. Remnants of slate and slate pencils may have belonged to the children as well. It is likely they all went to school at least to the age of 12, as state primary education in Victoria was not only free but compulsory by 1899.\(^{38}\) One brother and sister were rewarded for their good behaviour with china cups bearing the inscriptions “A present for a good boy” and “A present for a good girl”. They were in good company: their contemporaries around the world were likewise exhorted to good behaviour with such “moralising china”.\(^ {39}\) Similar items have been found in the Rocks in Sydney; a farm in Melrose, South Australia; and the Five Points District in New York.\(^ {40}\) These were children whose parents obviously invested time and effort in their moral and intellectual education.

Not surprisingly, there is no evidence of children on the site of the hotel accommodation. Next door on the middle terrace where two houses preceded the hall and warehouse, there is a poignant hint of a baby. Alongside the perfume bottles was a glass Special Feeding Bottle, perhaps used by a mother who was unable to breastfeed her baby. The baby would have been fed through a tube fitted into a cork in the neck of the bottle. In those days the tube could not be cleaned properly and babies often died from a bacterial infection, earning them the sobriquet “murder bottles”.\(^ {41}\) With the poor quality of water available in Bendigo, keeping this one clean would certainly have been difficult. We don’t know who the baby was or whether it survived, but he or she began life in a time when you could still stumble on a bush grave while out for a walk, a time when the final resting place of a whole family lost to diphtheria during the gold rush may have been marked only by a cairn of rocks or a few notches in a tree, and is now long gone.\(^ {42}\)

**A glimpse - and the work continues**

The feeding bottle, the tea sets, toys, medicine bottles and chamber pots have survived, along with thousands of other artefacts uncovered on the site, and give us tantalising glimpses of the people who lived and worked in Forest Street, Bendigo. Over the course of that five week excavation, over 4,000 artefacts were unearthed and preserved for posterity.\(^ {43}\) Yet excavating a site is only the start of the archaeologists’ work. It is the hours of researching: poring over artefacts, site maps, notes and reference material that can really flesh out the story of an excavation, and the people who made and used it. This work has barely begun with the Forest Street site, and perhaps one day we will have more than just hints of the hidden world of its residents and the lives they led.
Notes

2 Sterenberg and Ford, ibid., p. 16
3 Sterenberg and Ford, ibid., p. 11
4 Sterenberg and Ford, ibid., p. 19; also Expert Voices: Unearthing Little Lon 2008, video, Museum Victoria, Melbourne, video to accompany Little Lon exhibition
5 Sterenberg and Ford, ibid., sections 7 Findings and 8 Technical Report
7 In the 1891 Victorian census 21.15 per cent of women were classed as income earners. By 1899 women represented nearly 27 per cent of hands employed in various manufacturing industries. In both cases, women in Victoria outnumbered women in other colonies. Coghlan, T 1900, A Statistical Account of the Seven Colonies of Australasia, Government of New South Wales, Sydney, pp. 596-598
8 The 1891 Victorian census showed 1,333 “board, lodging house keepers and wife assisting” and “other engaged in boarding lodging and entertaining in Melbourne”, cited in Davison, G 1978, ‘Sydney and the bush: an urban context for the Australian Legend’, Historical Studies, vol. 18, no. 71, p. 194
10 Sands and McDougall’s Bendigo Suburban and District Directory for 1907-1908, Sands and McDougall Limited, Melbourne
11 Russell, G op. cit., p. 207 (reticulated water supply) and p. 138 (reticulated sewerage)
12 Sterenberg and Ford, op. cit., p. 41
14 “This was based on several ceramic items the artefact assemblage from [2005] was dated to between 1870 and 1920” (sic) – which covers both the period of tenants and boarding house. Sterenberg and Ford, op. cit., p. 90
16 The assemblage includes three sets of matching ironstone cups and saucers with Berlin swirl pattern. It was only imported into Australia from the 1860s (20 years after British potters first exported it to US) because the US civil war had closed ports there. Brooks, A 2005, An Archaeological Guide to British Ceramics in Australia 1788-1901, The Australasian Society for Historical Archaeology and the La Trobe University Archaeology Program, Sydney and Melbourne, p. 60
17 Brooks, ibid., p. 60
19 Brooks, op. cit., p. 40
20 All the tea wares for this period have come from the top terrace.
22 Miller, G 1991, ‘A Revised Set of CC Index Values for Classification and Economic Scaling of English Ceramics from 1787 to 1880’, Historical Archaeology, vol. 25, no. 1, p. 1. There is discussion that
Miller’s index can’t be transferred to Australian conditions because economic and political factors were so different in North America (see for example Brooks op. cit., p. 6), but it would still be fair to say creamware was the cheapest type of ceramic on the market.

A number of oyster shells are recorded in the artefacts database. They would have come by train after the line to Melbourne opened in October 1862 (See Mackay op. cit., p. 43). The first ice making factory opened in Melbourne in 1859 and John Bright was listed as a fishmonger in Bath Lane in the 1897-98 Voters’ Roll for The Sutton Ward of the City of Bendigo. For curried oysters see Mrs Maclurcan’s Cookery Book (3rd edition 1899) cited in Bannerman, C 1996, A Friend in the Kitchen: Old Australian Cookery Books, Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst, p. 174. According to Bannerman, Hannah Maclurcan was a hotel keeper, originally from Townsville.

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Sterenberg and Ford op. cit., p. 7
Sterenberg and Ford ibid., p. 10
Sands & McDougall Ltd op. cit. James Kennedy’s livery stables were listed next door to the ironmongers in the 1907-1908 directory.
Sterenberg and Ford op. cit., p. 10
Sterenberg and Ford ibid., p. 10
Russell, G op. cit., p. 73 in relation to mine shaft and dam water and p. 56 in relation to standpipes
Russell, G ibid., p. 40
Russell, G ibid., pp. 132-138
MacKay op. cit., p. 131 in relation to water carts and p. 77 in relation to out-of-work miners
Russell, G op. cit., p.129
Russell, G ibid., p. 119
Cohn, O 1964, ‘The Spirit of the Bush’ unpublished manuscript in Papers 1912-1964 held in State Library of Victoria
Bendigo was officially named Sandhurst when it became a city in 1871, but residents lobbied hard to have it changed to Bendigo, the name by which the district had long been known. After a vote by rate payers the name was changed in 1891.
Coghlan op. cit., p. 388
Muir, A (Curatorial Officer, Heritage Victoria) 2011, personal communication
Cohn op.cit.
It is difficult to say exactly how many artefacts were recovered as many are fragments. The total number of fragments is just under 6,000. Many fragments can and are being reassembled into artefacts as part of the conservation work undertaken by Heritage Victoria. With others it can be difficult to determine whether they are fragments of one object of samples of many.
6 Conclusions

While my part in the preparation of the Hidden Worlds exhibition in Bendigo was originally to draft label text for artefacts, the broad focus of this directed study was the communication of archaeological findings to non-specialist audiences. I concentrated on museums and written texts because of the requirements of my involvement in the exhibition, but the challenges of communicating with non-specialists extend across all media.

Those challenges share a common thread: storytelling. At face value it may seem simple enough to “tell the story” of a site, many archaeologists and museum curators struggle with questions about what story to tell and why. Archaeology, and subsequent communication of its findings, is an interpretative process. It does not simply uncover the “truth” about the past, so storytelling about the past requires an interpreter (archaeologist or curator for example) to create the story, to take the physical evidence and make a statement about what it might say about the people who left that evidence behind. Such a statement can never, therefore, be the “truth”; it relies for its creation on the knowledge and interests of the person or people creating it.

At a regional level the story told in an exhibition like this may arouse no interest beyond the locals and even then only among those interested in local history; but if the story is deemed of national importance it can certainly arouse strong interest. It is in this context that the role of such storytelling in creating our sense of ourselves in the present is evidenced. The conflict at a national political level occasioned by some exhibits curated by the museums of the Smithsonian Institution for example illustrates just how important such storytelling can be.

The awareness that interpretive texts or exhibitions are exactly that – interpretations – has led to experimentation and debate among specialists. In these (sometimes heated) debates between critics, archaeologists and curators, the non-specialist audiences to whom these stories are directed rarely speak. Perhaps the direction of my reading and museum visits, focussing as they did on techniques and theory, simply missed the experience of the “ordinary” visitor. Certainly the references I came across to the reactions of museum visitors were mediated by a researcher. So I could only rely on my own reactions to exhibits and texts as a guide to what might communicate a story of archaeology to a non-specialist audience most effectively.

Those I admired and tried to emulate were writers or exhibits to which I responded on an emotional level, those I felt evoked most strongly a “feel” for a site. I was, and remain, tentative about my interpretation of the Forest Street site. The awareness that I was creating meaning is a burden; but I believe even more strongly now that archaeology is a waste of time if no one outside the “heritage industry” hears about it. From a local to a national level, the material remains of the past contribute to a deeper sense of place even if that sense is contestable and contested, and perhaps it is even better if it is contested.

Creating a sense or feeling for place is a thoroughly non-scientific goal. Yet it requires a strong “scientific”, evidence-based foundation. On that foundation is built a “non-scientific”
artistic creation, a response to the evidence. The challenge remains to marry such seemingly disparate approaches into a union that engages the non-specialist at an emotional level. It is very difficult to do as it demands stepping outside the conventions of scientific reporting. I suspect – and hope - that the experimentation and debate will continue. What better indication is there of a good story than one that stirs strong passions?
7 References

7.1 Literature review


7.2 Exegesis on writing the catalogue essay

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7.3 Catalogue essay


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8 Appendix

Newspaper articles about the Forest Street excavation and assemblage
Treasures unearthed
20 Feb, 2009 08:19 AM

AN affluent lifestyle that existed in parts of Bendigo in the 1850s has come to light during an archaeological excavation in Forest Street.

Apart from the fine porcelain and perfume bottles that have been found, the existence of oyster shells suggests at least some early Bendigonians led the good life.

The oysters would have been brought from Melbourne by horse and cart or train, packed in ice that originated from North America.

The ice was shipped to Melbourne in large blocks and then broken down for industrial and domestic use. Archaeologist and Project Director Adam Ford said he had been amazed at the amount of building activity that had taken place on the Forest Street site.

He said the finds so far were some of the most significant artefacts recovered from Bendigo.

“The superb artefacts, including fine ceramic and glassware, together with the well-preserved foundations, will provide greater understanding of the early settlement, including how people worked and lived during the most dynamic era of Bendigo’s history.”

Mr Ford, who works for DIW International, said the gold rush was a significant event in Victoria’s history and while much was known about the mining, this excavation provided a rare opportunity to peer into the lives of entrepreneurial characters who arrived in the town at the beginning of the gold rushes.

He said the quality of the Dresden porcelain that had been found also suggested affluence that existed among merchants and professionals.

Newly found artefacts should be on public view
11 Mar, 2011 04:00 AM

I was intrigued to read in last week’s “Bendigo’s New Landmark” feature in the Bendigo Advertiser celebrating the opening of 10-16 Forest Street, that it was built on one of the most important archaeological sites excavated on the Victorian goldfields.

The centre pages of the feature illustrated some of the many artefacts recovered.

The article on the page stated that “this building project also delivered a comprehensive and valuable insight into Bendigo life”.

The question I ask is to whom did it deliver that insight?

Probably like many, I watched the archaeologists at work and read about the excavation in the Bendigo Advertiser. That and this brief overview are the only results of the excavation that I have seen. Where are the artefacts now?

Will they be displayed somewhere so that Bendigonians can view this remarkable find?

Are there plans to tell the story it related to and is there somewhere we can hear it?

What use is a heritage investigation that reveals such an important story if the only people privy to the telling are archaeologists and commissioning developers?

Could we ordinary people hear it too?

HELEN CRONIN,
California Gully
Gold rush artefacts need home: archaeologist

JAMIE DUNCAN
21 Mar, 2011 04:05 AM

A TREASURE trove of gold rush artefacts uncovered at the site of Bendigo's newest office block deserves a permanent home in a museum in Bendigo, the archaeologist who found them says.

Priceless items from Bendigo's golden past were found at the site at 10-16 Forest Street in Bendigo, where RSD House now stands.

The dig offered an otherwise hidden view of what the neighbourhood was like from the earliest days of Bendigo's settlement, private archaeologist Adam Ford of DIG International said.

Mr Ford was commissioned by RSD Chartered Accountants, the developers of the site, to conduct the five-week dig in 2009.

The resulting report on the finds took eight months to write.

He commended RSD for funding the dig, for handing the artefacts to Heritage Victoria for preservation and for its willingness to display some of the artefacts in its offices, but he said Bendigo needed a museum.

"There isn't a suitable place for them to be looked at and displayed and for someone to tell their stories within the office building, and they would need to pay for the management that such a large collection requires," he said.

"They should be in a museum or a repository such as that but nothing like that is available in Bendigo.

"I think personally such a vital part of Bendigo's history should be kept somewhere its stories can be told and where it can be maintained and conserved."

Mr Ford performed a similar dig at the site of the Bendigo Bank building a few years earlier.

The collection amassed at the Forest Street site includes the remnants of early buildings, bottles and glassware — much of it intact — and evidence that businesses as diverse as a blacksmith and a brothel operated there.

"This was one of the richest and most significant archaeological sites ever found in the Victorian goldfields," Mr Ford said.

"It gives us a really clear picture of the changing times and the changing uses of that area that we have not had before. It's very exciting."

The collection is being collated and preserved by Heritage Victoria in Melbourne.

Details of the find come as the Bendigo Historical Society pushes for a new museum to house its collection once it vacates the old Bendigo jail in May.

Most popular articles
1. McKern steals the limelight
2. Bendigo shop owner's funeral date set
3. Attackers appeal jail terms
4. Bendigo police cop a beating
5. Caleb's trip to hell
6. Ladscne eyes return to Golden Square after ...
7. Father Bob for Borough
8. Business drops off after article published
9. Golden Square appoints Mark Lloyd as ...
10. Everyone's a winner as Bendigo Show hits ...

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15
Treasures to go on display

11 Apr, 2011 05:00 AM

HISTORIC treasures unearthed at a Forest Street building site and other sites in Bendigo will be the feature of a new exhibit at the Post Office Gallery early next year.

City of Greater Bendigo city history and collections curator Sandra Bruce said the archaeological exhibit would be the first of its kind at the gallery.

Most of the artefacts came from an archaeological dig at the site of the new R&D House building in Forest Street.

The items, which include glassware, figurines, segments of clay pipe, buttons, coins and some house fittings, are being held in Melbourne by Heritage Victoria following the 2009 dig because no permanent space is available in Bendigo to house them.

Ms Bruce said other artefacts would include items from the Chinese brick kiln in Thunder Street, an excavation in Golden Gully and the Catherine Reef United mine.

"I think an exhibit such as this is really important, not just for visitors to understand our rich history, but so we can appreciate it as well," Ms Bruce said.

"Obviously the gold rush is a big part of our history.

"It's why we're here, so it's great that we can offer this exhibition to tell our story and bring our history to life."

The exhibition is in the early stages of planning but is likely to run from January to April next year.

It will feature interpretative displays and a short film presentation.

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