



**ALL MY  
LIFETIME IT  
WAS THERE...**

**PAUL LAMBETH**

**EUREKA CENTRE BALLARAT**

**26 August 2023 - 31 March 2024**

# ALL MY LIFETIME IT WAS THERE...

## PAUL LAMBETH

'All my lifetime it was there...' is an exhibition revisiting a 1992 documentary photography project by Paul Lambeth. The project was commissioned by the National Trust of Victoria to probe whether the significance criteria for heritage aligned with community understandings of heritage value. Paul was entrusted to engage with the community to capture the people and places of Ballarat East.

The original photographs were taken on a 5x4 inch view camera and printed on silver bromide paper. The project culminated in a community gathering and the launch of a large-scale, single edition book of photographs presented alongside poems by Linda Blake. Revisiting key photographs 30 years on highlights both the tension between preservation and loss in Ballarat East's urban landscape, as well as the cultural and generational changes evident in one of Australia's most significant colonial era urban areas. The resulting photographs explore aspects of tangible and intangible heritage and capture moments where these aspects merge, often in highly personal ways.

Ballarat East is an historic part of the greater city of Ballarat that emerged from a ramshackle tent city in the early 1850s. Its historic heart, centred around Main Road and Barkly Street, quickly emerged as a vibrant hub of hotels, shops, and entertainment venues, vying for the custom of a growing population of gold prospectors. A great fire on 11 January 1861 destroyed many of the buildings on Main Road.<sup>1</sup> Such was the strength of Ballarat's gold rush economy that they were quickly rebuilt. An editorial in 'The Star' on 29 August 1861 stated, *'If fire is a purifier, so may it in another sense be esteemed a donor of beauty.'* The writer continued, *'These remarks are particularly applicable to the last great conflagration which desolated Ballarat. The structures which have arisen in place of those swept away, are generally of a still superior order to any that have preceded them.'*<sup>2</sup>

Gold rush wealth continued to be invested in Ballarat East. More socially respectable institutions emerged, and this indelibly changed the neighbourhood's character. Civic and religious leaders sought to bring social order and moral oversight to what was an unbridled, itinerant community. These establishment values were embodied in impressive stone and brick civic structures and retrospective attempts to contain the community's activities through town planning. Despite these efforts, the legacy of transience persists in the unconventionally fashioned streets and laneways that emerged organically, notably the eccentrically serpentine Humffray Street. These meandering legacy streets were later infilled with grid-planning, embodying the tension between private agency and public control to this day.

In Ballarat East there is a palpable overlaying of the structured and orderly over the amorphous and untamed. This extends to where the built environment juts against and forcefully corrals Yarowee Creek, which remains secreted in the heart of the suburb. If only travelling along Ballarat East's main arterial roads, one may form a lasting impression of a community defined by ostentatious civic buildings and grand streetscapes. But trek a little further into its interior and you will find modest rows of miners' cottages, derelict industrial buildings and rutted gravel roads. The interior of the suburb speaks profoundly of the lived experience of working class people.

30 years on from Paul's project, the history of uneven development in Ballarat East remains apparent and continues with the slow but inevitable creep of gentrification. Yet Ballarat East has largely maintained much of its integrity and character when compared to inner city suburbs in Melbourne, for example. But change has occurred and will continue to occur, and the question posed by Paul's project remains as relevant as ever: what do the residents of these community's feel about their place in the world?

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1 'The Conflagration on the Main Road' in *The Star*, 12 January 1861, Ballarat, Victoria, p 2. Retrieved 12/08/2023 from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article66336805>

2 'Street Architecture' in *The Star*, Ballarat, Victoria, 29 August 1861, p 2. Retrieved 12/08/2023 from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article66341674>

The concept of solastalgia was first advanced by the environmental philosopher, Glenn Albrecht. He defined solastalgia as, ‘...the pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of isolation connected to the present state of one’s home and territory.’<sup>3</sup> and ‘...a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at ‘home.’<sup>4</sup> He continued stating, ‘(a)ny context where place identity is challenged by pervasive change to the existing order has potential to deliver solastalgia’.<sup>5</sup>

Whether applied to climate change, disasters, or urban transformation, solastalgia is most intensely felt when places of deep importance to us are destroyed or substantially changed without our consent and beyond our control. Sometimes these are places linked to our foundational memories of life, or places where we experienced rites of passage. They may be places where our personal and collective identities were formed and remain deeply anchored.

When people are asked to speak to the heritage value of their communities their feedback is siphoned through the codified language of the heritage industry. This privileges the social, material and aesthetic significance of built environments and diminishes the importance of the personal, emotional connections people have to place. Predating the coining of the term solastalgia, Paul’s photographs of Ballarat East sought to elevate evanescent moments of individual connection and position them at the heart of a material world otherwise assumed to be ceaseless and unyielding to personal experience.

In thinking about the function of photography Roland Barthes wrote, ‘*The Photograph does not necessarily say what is no longer, but only what has been*’.<sup>6</sup> Barthes then recounted a moment when he saw a photograph of himself though could not recall when it was taken but, ‘...because it was a photograph I would not deny I had been there...’<sup>7</sup> He then described going to the photographer’s exhibition ‘...to learn at last what I no longer knew about myself’.<sup>8</sup>

This idea of the photograph as a witness to the truth is a prescient notion when reflecting of Paul’s photographs of Ballarat East. This is the power of photography and the reason it was a critical tool, not merely to document the people and places of Ballarat East, and contribute to an encapsulation of intangible heritage, but to proffer an exploration of the psychogeography of both the photographer and his subjects. This body of work extends beyond notions of intangible heritage that are generally associated with the collective. It casts a light on the personal expression of intangible heritage; the kind that dwells in our hearts as a deeply profound feeling and experience of place.

**Anthony Camm**

Eureka Centre Ballarat

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3 Albrecht, G. “Solastalgia’: a new concept in health and identity’ in *PAN: philosophy activism nature*, 2005; 3, p 17. Retrieved 17/08/2023 [https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/journal\\_contribution/\\_Solastalgia\\_a\\_new\\_concept\\_in\\_health\\_and\\_identity/4311905](https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/journal_contribution/_Solastalgia_a_new_concept_in_health_and_identity/4311905)

4 Ibid

5 Ibid

6 Barthes, R. ‘Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography’, Hill and Wang, New York, 1981, p 85.

7 Ibid

8 Ibid





Paul Lambeth, *Ballarat East Heritage Project: Mr Luke, Glazebrook St 1992*, printed in 2023 from original 5x4 inch negative, 42cm x 59.4cm, Giclee print on Hahnemuhle photo rag.



Paul Lambeth, *Ballarat East Heritage Project: Sacred Heart Students, Victoria St 1992*, printed in 2023 from original 5x4 inch negative, 42cm x 59.4cm, Giclee print on Hahnemuhle photo rag.



Paul Lambeth, *Ballarat East Heritage Project: Synagogue, Barkly Street* 1992, printed in 2023 from original 5x4 inch negative, 42cm x 59.4cm, Giclee print on Hahnemuhle photo rag.



Paul Lambeth, *Ballarat East Heritage Project: Fire Station, Barkly and East St Sth* 1992, printed in 2023 from original 5x4 inch negative, 42cm x 59.4cm, Giclee print on Hahnemuhle photo rag.



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Cover image: Paul Lambeth, *Ballarat East Heritage Project: Yarrowee Creek, Sunnyside Mill* 1992 (detail), printed in 2023 from original, 5x4 inch negative, 42cm x 59.4cm, Giclee print on Hahnemuhle photo rag.

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