



Dear Reader

Following our successful Annual General Meeting and Conference in London earlier in the year, we are already looking ahead to next years' event which will be held in central London on Saturday 1 April 2017. When the BFMS was formed in 1993, I doubt whether our founding members could have predicted that false memory and false allegations of past childhood abuse would endure over time. While it is true that we have witnessed a marked reduction in the incidence of families reporting to the Society throughout this period, the problem of adult accusers claiming to have 'recovered' memories of past child abuse following therapeutic input remains a pressing concern. In a substantial majority of cases, new members contact the Society following allegations of repressed childhood sexual abuse usually involving psychotherapy or hypnotherapy. Typically, adult accusers present to a therapist with anxiety, depression or low self-esteem. This is exactly what happened in one recent case where a daughter accused her father of past sexual abuse. He was arrested and placed on police bail. His daughter later accused a number of different individuals; however, following police investigation it was deemed that the allegations were not credible and the case was not proceeded with. For the accused father, the experience was harrowing. Earlier this month I attended a Crown Court hearing in the North West with two of our members who were charged with historic childhood sexual abuse; the complainant made allegations following psychotherapy for anxiety. Their experience has been traumatising. Following police interviews and a lengthy period on police bail, earlier this year the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) ruled that there was sufficient evidence to proceed with the case. There were several court appearances, first in a magistrates' court and subsequently in Crown Court; the case was then listed for trial. Lawyers for the defence instructed an expert witness. He concluded that the complainant (who suffered from mental health problems) was experiencing false memories. However, the prosecution also instructed an expert a few weeks before the case

was due to go to trial. Council for the defence advised Helen and Peter (not their real names) to prepare themselves for the trial. Then came the breakthrough. The expert for the Crown concurred that the complainant was suffering from false memories. In Court, the prosecuting barrister addressed the Judge: he proclaimed that he would be 'professionally embarrassed' if the case proceeded to trial. The end appeared to be in sight. However, there was a further twist. Utilising the Victims' Right to Review Scheme (2013), the complainant appealed the CPS decision not to proceed to trial. The case was adjourned pending a review of the evidence. In court a few weeks later, the atmosphere was tense. Finally following a case review, the prosecution barrister announced that the CPS would not proceed to trial on the grounds that the complainant did indeed suffer from false memory. The judge instructed two not guilty verdicts. The *legal* nightmare was over. The challenge of re-building a relationship with their estranged daughter is just beginning.

Elsewhere in this edition, you can read book reviews about two landmark publications from Oxford University Press. *Witness Testimony in Sexual Cases: Evidential, Investigative and Scientific Perspectives* (edited by Pamela Radcliffe *et*

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al); *Wrongful Allegations of Sexual and Child Abuse* (edited by Ros Burnett) contain a number of important essays which focus, *inter alia*, on recent legislative changes to the criminal justice system and misconceptions about memory. The latter publication, considers the devastating impact on the lives of those falsely accused of sexual abuse. Last but certainly not least, the newsletter contains a review of Julia Shaw's illuminating book, *The Memory Illusion: Remembering, Forgetting, and the Science of False Memory*. This issue also contains a lively Member's Forum and Professor Jean La Fontaine re-visits the moral panic about Satanic Ritual Abuse in the United Kingdom.

The following edited extract from our member's forum is being re-published from an earlier newsletter.

False Memory involves not just recovering supposed memories but making them the central feature in one's life, the basis of a new identity. The rewards can be substantial: attention and sympathy; status as a survivor ... the companionship of fellow sufferers; above all, the comfort of knowing that, whatever one's problems, somebody else was to blame ... When the blow falls we feel shock, horror, perhaps bewilderment. We want to make sense of what has happened to us, so we read books about false memory, we go to BFMS meetings and we talk to others in the same situation.

Then what? Does being an accused parent become a full-time occupation? Some accused parents are forced into action – I think of those threatened with court proceedings. For most of us, though, there is a choice ... There are other roles for us to perform and more productive uses for our energy. We may be husbands, wives, grandparents. We may be active in our local community or a voluntary organisation. We may have a sport we enjoy playing or a hobby that gives us satisfaction. We may even have to work for a living!

Isn't there a tightrope to be walked, a balance to be struck between equipping ourselves to contend with false allegations and allowing them to dominate our lives? We cannot forget what has taken place, nor do we wish to do so. But by putting it in some kind of perspective we can diminish its power over us.

The editor would like to express his thanks to Malcolm Stern, the author of this article and a former Trustee of the BFMS.

Kevin Felstead

## SPECIAL FEATURE

### Speak of the Devil

Professor Jean La Fontaine

It is over 20 years since the rash of allegations that rituals of devil worship, including the sexual abuse of children, the sacrifice, and (sometimes) eating, of animals, children and even babies as well as other extreme acts of depravity were being conducted across the U.K. In 1994 I reported to the Department of Health that in the 84 cases in England and Wales that were the basis of my research; I could find no supporting evidence for the existence of such a satanic cult. The allegations have not stopped however, although they no longer get the publicity they used to have as, officially, satanic or ritual abuse no longer exists. It is not mentioned in guidance to social workers on the subject of abuse of children. However, a particularly unpleasant case that occurred in Hampstead in 2014 has recently been widely reported in the press (reported in the BFMS newsletter in Sept.2015). The persistence of these allegations into the twenty-first century repeats the questions that I thought I had answered at the end of the twentieth! This is, first: how is it that 'victims' can tell stories of gruesome experiences that they never had? Secondly: how is it that adults, many of them sensible, educated people, believe these stories? These two questions are also raised by the cases of so-called 'historic abuse'. The answers are interrelated though I shall try and deal with them separately.

One of the best-known organisations promoting the allegation that children were being abused by worshippers of the devil in the late twentieth century was *Believe the Children*. For a while it was very successful. The title referred to the myth that it was young children who had told of the satanic abuse. It was supported by the firm belief, almost dogma, that such children do not lie and therefore, that what they disclosed about the existence of satanic or ritual abuse was indubitably the truth. However, the stories that were publicised as what young victims told social workers, foster parents and other sympathetic adults were actually nothing of the sort. They were what adults said the children told them and, as I was able to show, there were various reasons why this was not what the children said.

Most children are quite quick to pick up what adults want from them, although a four-year-old boy in one case suffered 33 questions about

ghosts before he began to talk about the ghosts at his home. Some children were particularly adept at this and it was noticeable that in any case that involved several children, there were only one or two who were the main source of the authorities' alleged information. In some cases, these children told the others or 'explained' to the less sensitive what had allegedly happened. Others used bits of films and other television material that they had seen and remembered and one slightly older girl, when pressed for details said in astonishment: "But I was in my dream", clearly indicating what she was using as an account of what had happened to her.

In most cases there was pressure on the children to respond to requests to "tell". When they did not, it was generally thought that the devil-worshippers had prevented them from doing so, using magical procedures such as spiders on the wall or "trigger words" which, when spoken, silenced the children. I need only refer briefly to the effect of mistakes in transcriptions of interviews that altered what was said. In one case they were carefully elucidated by a consultant who checked their accuracy, finding over and over again that mistakes altered what the children actually said. The report might record 'No' as an answer when a video recording showed a child responding 'Yes' or vice versa. Using leading questions, the alleged stories of other children's alleged stories and promises of rewards were other means by which responses were obtained. The results usually reflected and confirmed the adults' views.

There are some recognisable parallels with cases of recovered memories. First, note the parallel with the popular dogma that 'victims' should always be believed. The investigator of allegations of 'historic' child abuse in Dolphin Square, an experienced police officer, recently pronounced the alleged victim's claims as credible and true BEFORE any investigations had been made. Well-known therapists such as Valerie Sinason, have insisted that therapists must discard the previous understanding that a patient's story is true for the teller, though not necessarily for the hearer, and convince themselves of the reality of the patient's account. This approach, while no doubt easing the strain for victims who try to recount what happened, risks serious miscarriages of justice. Belief in sincerity is not the same as a conclusion, based on good evidence, that the truth has been uncovered.

A second parallel can be drawn between the vulnerable children who were pressured by the authorities to 'tell' everything they had suffered and the vulnerable men and woman, sometimes

disturbed, often depressed, who felt pressure from the counsellor, psychotherapist or analyst to search their memories for what the questioner 'knew' must be there. The silence of the children and the blankness of patients' memories were both taken to mean the existence of serious trauma and/or the ability of the perpetrators to control what their victims were able to say. Very few of those who believed in the existence of satanic cults were prepared to believe that silence meant that there was nothing to say.

However, not all children were young and vulnerable in this way. The teenagers who figured in some cases resembled the adults in some cases of historic abuse in that they were active participants in the creation of the stories of what they had suffered. Here again it was pressure to tell that encouraged the expounding of horrific stories of what they had seen and had suffered themselves. As one near-teenager explained: "You lot are into these things and the police and social workers wanted to hear them so I thought I had to say something and I went from there". Teenagers, like 'survivors' of ritual abuse, have many opportunities to learn from each other and from printed materials what is expected. Some of them chose the people to listen who showed a disposition to believe everything that was said. The lengthy sessions with these confidants, with social workers or therapists were occasions when the 'story', whether of 'satanic' or 'historic' abuse was put together.

Apart from the dogma that victims must be believed where did the pressure to 'tell' come from? There are several elements that make up the deep convictions which caused it. In half the cases I studied the children had suffered sexual abuse, usually in their homes, and in many of those cases and in some others they had been badly mistreated as well. As one campaigner put it: 'It was hard to believe that people could be capable of such evil'. For evangelical Christians an explanation was provided by the perpetrators' allegiance to the devil and this explanation was accepted by the unreligious who did not themselves believe in Satan. The argument that the cult members believed in him was seen to be sufficient. Equally, it is important to stress that the alleged sexual abuse of the teenagers concerned was far less well established. For example, when one of them had an abortion, the identity of the father was never mentioned and in other cases the girls' accounts were clearly fabrications.

Another idea, drawn from what has been said to be a misreading of Freud, asserted that most, if not all psychological illness or damage, came

from earlier traumas caused by sexual abuse. 'Experts' in the diagnosis of trauma in children circulated lists of the 'indicators' that pointed to the greatest trauma: ritual abuse. Many of the symptoms, such as bed-wetting were common symptoms of psychological disturbance and therefore, not surprisingly, occurred in the children taken into care. These were used to 'prove' the validity of the 'indicators'. The use of indicators to identify the children who had suffered ritual abuse made lengthy, unproductive and distressing interviews with the children themselves less necessary and they rapidly became commonplace.

A very important part played in causing the pressure to tell was the conviction that only by 'recovering' the memory or recounting the experience could healing from the trauma begin. This belief, embedded in a long-standing folk belief that is encapsulated in the common saying: "Better out than in" may refer to eating something bad as well as keeping a terrifying experience to oneself. A foster-mother recorded in her notes when the children she fostered "really needed to talk". The pressure put on 'victims' was justified as it was for their own good. Of course it also contributed to the chances of identifying the perpetrator but what was largely concentrated on was not the identity of the guilty but the detail of *what happened*.

The authority of experts who spoke at conferences and on television, and who constructed lists of 'indicators' of satanic abuse were taken as guaranteeing the validity of their views. Such people claimed knowledge of which those who listened were ignorant. They reminded their listeners that when it was discovered that children might be abused and even killed by their parents many people refused to believe that it was so. But time showed that they were wrong not to accept what was shown to be the truth; similarly, they said, time would show the existence of satanic abuse.

It is the presence of crusaders advocating belief rather than argument that finally underlies this comparison between satanic abuse and false memories. Listeners were asked to believe what they were told, not to accept conclusions based on evidence. The cases, whether of recent satanic abuse or recovered memories of it, figure vulnerable victims under pressure to construct stories that will both authenticate their status as victims and heal them in the telling.

## False Memories and Bewitchment in France

### Emmanuel Fansten

In autumn 2009, Emiline A, aged 35 at the time, went to see the gendarmes in Lille to tell them that she had information about a paedophile ring which killed children.

Having previously held a responsible managerial position at BNP Paribas and speaking clearly and convincingly, she declared that she had herself been the victim of atrocious things organised by this ring and by her own parents - (child sacrifice, orgies with underage children, black magic, abortions, etc., etc.).

Investigations proved these accusations unfounded and the gendarmes began to think of the phenomenon of recovered memory leading a person to believe that his or her psychological suffering is the result of an un-remembered trauma. The therapy consists of getting the patient to break with his or her family, thus facilitating submission to the therapist.

The gendarmes began to link this case to other similar ones, all concerning a certain Marie-Christine P. whose osteopathy treatments invariably morphed into sessions where the patients recount hitherto unrealised memories relating to sexual abuse in childhood.

One woman related that the therapist had tried to convince her that her mother had tried to kill her while she was still in the womb. Another accused her father of rape.

In every case, a complete break with the family was presented as the only way to obtain a cure. Patients are encouraged to bring charges against their parents and to destroy their family by all possible means.

A specialist Parisian police unit investigating cases of abuse of weakness made the connection with the Lille cases. It turned out that Emiline A. knew Marie-Christine P. and her treatment after a fall from a horse soon led to more intrusive questions, with the result that Emiline developed a strong hatred of her parents who were accused of participating in a paedophile ring which includes members of the secret services, police, judges, psychiatrists, etc.

The police were intrigued by the colossal sums of money given by Emiline to Marie-Christine, for example €800, 000 in cash in one year. Raids on Marie-Christine's country house uncovered large amounts of cash. The police noted a strong discrepancy between the proceeds of the consultancy business that Marie-Christine had set up and her life style.

The life style was the result of the fascination and generosity of her patients. One gave her all her jewellery; another sold Marie-Christine her Paris apartment for a derisory sum. A select group of patients would be invited to her country home, dubbed a 'detector of truth'. These were then charged with finding new recruits for her system.

Emiline was the most efficient of these recruiters. She had been appointed deputy director of an important subsidiary of BNP and directed huge consultancy contracts to Marie-Christine. In fact, Marie-Christine began to make all the important decisions in the company and place her pawns as she wished, even receiving part of their salary. The contracts finally amounted to 2.5 million euros.

BNP eventually carried out an internal audit which revealed no justification for huge expenses and raised suspicions of fraud on Emeline's part.

A dozen people have brought charges against Marie-Christine, including Emiline, who unlike the others has done so only in order to have access to the documents in the case. She still considers Marie-Christine 'a woman of brilliance and integrity'.

*This is a translation from the article which appeared in Libération, August 2016.*

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## **Did that just happen? Or was it my imagination?**

Think of your most vivid memory from your childhood in full rich detail. What can you smell? Hear? See? Now what if you found out that memory was completely false? It's a common Christmas dinner debate between each generation when the details of anecdotes don't quite match up to everyone else's recollection, but is it possible to have an entire memory that simply did not happen? The answer is yes. Since the early 1970s researcher Elizabeth Loftus has been investigat-

ing false memories; she found that through simple interviewing techniques (Loftus & Palmer, 1974) it is possible to 'implant' something that never happened into someone's memory of their childhood and they will walk away convinced that they have a clear and vivid memory of a past event that never actually occurred (Loftus & Pickrell, 1995). Memories can be distorted in a number of ways, ranging from suggestive questions, a time delay between event and recall, access to conflicting information (e.g. media reports); even certain personality traits like imagination can affect susceptibility to memory distortion (French & Stone, 2014).

In a piece of research published earlier this year a group of 226 men and women were asked about their paranormal beliefs and anomalous experiences in addition to a measure of 'fantasy proneness' (imagination). Included in these questionnaires were questions about parenting and possible childhood trauma/abuse. Those who reported childhood abuse were more likely to claim to have had paranormal experiences and have spiritual beliefs, but this was only true of people with an over-active imagination (measured by fantasy proneness) (Rogers & Lowrie, 2016).

Researchers Paul Rogers and Emma Lowrie offered an explanation: perhaps children that have experienced such trauma will retain their fairy tale fantasies into adulthood so that they can escape the horrors of their cruel reality? Belief in mind control and predicting the future could be signs of a desperate attempt to create a sense of control over a situation (Rogers & Lowrie, 2016).

However: both of these explanations ignore something that's potentially very important. Fantasy proneness as a trait has been strongly associated with hypnotic susceptibility (Wilson & Barber, 1982), reports of near-death experiences, confusion between reality and imagination (French & Stone, 2014) and memory distortion (Geraerts et al., 2005). Rogers and Lowrie use these connections to dismiss some of the reports of paranormal experiences, but interestingly enough fail to apply this to the self-reported childhood trauma – could it be that the childhood trauma is as much a product of false memory as the paranormal experiences? What if their over-active imagination was actually the *cause* of the reported abuse rather than the result?

Harald Merckelbach is a Dutch researcher and his study indicates that people with over-active imaginations tell more believable 'lies' about their

childhood. Merckelbach asked people to write both a factual and a fictional story from their childhood. The stories were then assessed using a technique called Criteria Based Content Analysis, a systematic assessment of truthfulness spoken accounts of events which compares grammatical and structural components of an account against typical characteristics of truth and lies – for example, a truthful person is more likely to doubt his or her own memory of events (Blandon-Gitlin et al., 2009). Merckelbach discovered that people who are fantasy prone are “superior storytellers” and their fictional stories were so rich in emotional and sensory detail they were often indistinguishable to the factual ones (Merckelbach, 2004). Worryingly the Criteria Based Content Analysis is estimated the most commonly used analysis of its kind worldwide (Blandon-Gitlin et al., 2009) and is a core component of the Statement Validity Assessment (SVA) used by forensic experts as a ‘lie detector tool’ to assess the strength of a statement. This technique is used especially in sexual assault cases where there are usually only two witness statements of the alleged crime (prosecutor vs. defendant) (Raskin & Esplin, 1991).

One of the main characteristics of fantasy prone people is the inability to be able to distinguish between their imagination and what is real, making them more susceptible to false memories. This is heavily supported by more research in the Netherlands with Merckelbach and his colleagues when they discovered people that are fantasy prone were more likely to have felt disconnected from themselves. People who scored highly on questions such as ‘have you ever arrived at your destination having no memory of how you got there?’ were also more likely to experience false memories and intriguingly were more likely to claim that both neutral and negative events had happened to them at a young age (Merckelbach, Horselenberg & Stougie, 2000). This implies that the fantasy prone are not only more likely to truly believe that they have experienced things that never happened but that they are also more biased to responding to neutral and negative experiences in questionnaires that are very similar to those used by Rogers and Lowrie (2016).

“One of the main characteristics of fantasy prone people is the inability to be able to distinguish between their imagination and what is real, making them more susceptible to false memories.”

So beyond questionnaires and psychological experiments what are the real world implications of this? Are there any? Unfortunately the answer is, yet again, yes.

The story of the Felstead family is a harrowing tale that encompasses what can happen when one woman is a victim of the terrifying repercussions of false memories. In July 2005 the Felstead family received the news of their daughter’s death over 2 weeks after her passing. Determined to discover what events had led to their loss and also why they had not been informed sooner the Felsteads began asking very important questions. Carol Felstead (later changed to Carole Myers) had become progressively more distant to her family through the years leading up to her passing and no one seemed to know why – it became clear that there was no simple answer to this

question when the Felsteads were given access to a document so disturbing it would change their lives forever.

The document purportedly written by

Carol, yet curiously not signed or dated, was filled with grotesque accusations, which included secret killings and Satanic Ritual Abuse. The document alleged that her mother murdered Carol’s sister (Joan Julie) and sat Carol on top of her corpse before burning the house down to conceal the evidence. When the facts were checked following Carol’s premature death, aged 41, it was proven that Joan Julie died as an infant in 1962 (according to her death certificate), the house fire occurred the following year, in 1963, and Carol Felstead wasn’t born until 1964 (Felstead, 2011).

Even though Carol had reported “no knowledge of Satanic Ritual Abuse” when she began therapy Carol later reported memories of a court case in which her mother and father were defendants in a criminal trial against the Satanic Abuse. There was no trial: it was a myth. Despite the impossibility of these claims and also the fact that Carol had been sectioned numerous times under the mental health act (a fact of which the Felstead family had no knowledge) these accusations were taken very seriously and were even documented on the intelligence systems of the Metropolitan Police (Felstead, 2011).

Carol's false memories began to surface when she started seeing a psychotherapist through the NHS who held a very strong belief that there was a satanic cult at large across the UK and used profoundly unorthodox techniques to uncover 'repressed memories' of the conspiracy. Repressed memories are a core component of psychoanalytic theories, despite the fact that it is not supported by scientific literature many psychotherapists still operate under the assumption of its existence. Some researchers have even found that people that reported having repressed memories were less able to discriminate between reality and imagined events (McNally, Clancy, Barrett, & Parker, 2005).

Dr Valerie Sinason diagnoses historic sexual abuse including satanic involvement through observing patient's behaviour - even when their spoken concerns are much more mundane. She told the Observer newspaper that a patient flinching at the colour purple or green is a strong sign that they have unknowingly been a victim of Satanic abuse. Her explanation: those are the colours worn by the High Priest and Priestess during violent Satanic rituals. Perversely, an even stronger indication is patient's outright denial that they were abused at all; she warned the journalist Will Storr that a patient saying "Oh my family is wonderful! I can't remember any of it!" is the closest thing to a full on confirmation in her therapy room. Sinason was one of the many believers in Satanic ritual abuse that Carol Felstead encountered, and with every believer she saw, the more elaborate her false memories became.

This type of therapy is reminiscent of that used by The Lantern Project, a charity that only recently lost NHS funding after seven years when it came to light that VIP sex scandal allegations turned out to be the product of false memories. The charity use a technique they call Unstructured Therapeutic Disclosure in which "the victims do not need to tell us what happened to them as we already know, because it happened to us" (Wright, 2015).

Hopefully, the danger of this idea in conjunction with vulnerable suggestible patients is obvious. Dr Julia Shaw, a psychologist at Southbank University in London, used a very similar technique to implant memories in her experiments – nothing more than telling her participants that she knows they committed theft, assault or an assault with a weapon in the past (a complete fabrication). After

just three sessions the majority of her healthy participants had a full false memory of doing exactly that (Shaw & Porter, 2015). How much greater would the effect be on vulnerable patients in a therapeutic setting?

What are the steps that we can take to be sure that there is never a repeat of the horrors that Carol and the Felstead family have experienced? In research and in the real world whenever accusations and claims of this nature arise we *must* ask – has this person seen a psychotherapist or a hypnotherapist? Did they have memories of these events when they entered therapy or are they the result of memory regression therapy, UTD, etc? Most experts in this research area would advise that if you started the session without a memory and left with one – no matter how realistic it may seem - the chances of it being true are slim indeed.

So before the next Christmas debate stop and ask yourself – 'did that actually happen? Or was it just my imagination?'

*Editor's note: the author is studying psychology at Goldsmith's University.*

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# MEMBERS' FORUM

## Dear Therapist...

12<sup>th</sup> July 2016

Dear 'Therapist',

I have no way of knowing who you are or where you live but I hope that this letter reaches you. You have become very much part of the life of our family over the past seven years, and yet bizarrely I have no idea who you are or what you look like.

Seven years ago, was the time when my funny, clever, beautiful, creative, impulsive little sister walked out of our lives almost completely. She became withdrawn, volatile and fearful and she burned with a white hot anger. She would offer no explanation for her estrangement or this change in behaviour and became paranoid and abusive if she thought any of the family were discussing her.

In the intervening years my mother, with whom my sister had been extremely close, suffered a brain haemorrhage, partial loss of sight and was diagnosed with vascular dementia, she died in 2014. She and my father were a devoted couple, Dad looked after Mum with the help of a live-in carer. They missed my little sister all of every day that she did not come. As her confusion and bewilderment deteriorated, Mum would ask over and over again, 'Why does she hate us?' What have we done? Do you think she's having a breakdown? Do you think she will come?'

I want you to appreciate the grief and pain that Mum went through as she struggled to understand, day after day after day for hours at a time. You took away the last years of their time with my sister and both Mum and Dad went through a bereavement for her, and no, of course, despite my sister's protestations Mum had no idea why they 'were being punished'.

Now, apparently with your encouragement, my sister has travelled the long distance to let us know why she has been estranged. She has devastated our lives, ripped our family apart and effectively killed off my 96 year old father with her allegations of historic child sexual abuse. She clearly believes everything she says, allegations involving repeated rape, torture, groups of strangers at multiple venues, implicating other members of my family, my godparents and teach-

**Diary Date**

**BFMS AGM  
2017**

**Saturday 1st April**

**in Central London**



ers at our school. She remains fearful and paranoid.

I work in early years education, I attend safeguarding courses, I know about the physical and psychological effects of child abuse. I know that there is no such person as the person who can be held as above suspicion. I don't just refute these fantastical allegations because it might be hurtful to think it could have been happening with people I know and trust, I refute this nonsense because I was there! Anyone that shares any time with my sister listening to these 'memories' would know that they are clearly impossible.

So, I asked my sister, did you seek help when you started to have these worrying 'flashbacks'? Did you talk to your GP? Did you think you should seek psychiatric help? 'Oh yes, I have a therapist', a therapist that she found on Google, a therapist that told her she was 'an expert in child abuse'. A therapist which she says explained all about how childhood memories of trauma are repressed, that everything that happens to you in later life, your low self esteem, your inability to make relationships work, are all down to the abuse you suffered as a child.

I didn't know much about recovered memories then. I didn't know much about the denounced theories of Freud about repressed memory. I had never heard of the False Memory Society or read the work of Elisabeth Loftus, Richard McNally or Julia Shaw or read the book by Meredith Maran that details the insidious nature of this laying down of falsehoods in the minds of the vulnerable that come to so-called 'therapists' like you to seek help.

People like my sister are preyed upon by people like you, a dependency builds up which it is in your financial interest to exploit. She doesn't have a lot of cash but she becomes a 'nice little earner' for you whilst for her part she is encouraged to throw off those people who actually love her and care deeply for her welfare.

I want you to know that we all love my sister very much and will continue to do so whatever nonsense you instil into her consciousness. We are her family and we won't ever give up on her.

It's not her that I direct my feelings to in this letter. Do I have any anger issues? You bet – and not because I had any child abuse either. My Mum was a fighter and I am too. If I ever find a way to hold you accountable for what you have done, be assured that I will do so.

Big Sister

## **We trusted the System—and It destroyed us**

### **An open letter to the Prime Minister**

I wrote to you in May 2015 explaining the situation me and my whole family are in. We are all now vulnerable victims of your justice system that allows guilty verdicts on non-existent crimes. We are all devastated at the way in which we have been treated by the police, CPS, legal aid lawyers, barristers and the judiciary.

We have been sacrificed. Our lives stolen and our whole family put into trauma.

The criminal courts, following the ruling of the House of Lords in DPP v P (1991) 2 AC 447, had come to accept multiple allegations as mutually corroborative, even when they were not 'strikingly similar.' In 2002, the Commons Select Committee on Home Affairs issued an authoritative report which warned that the combination of this judgement and the lure of compensation was creating a 'new breed' of miscarriage of justice. Among the committee's members who signed this report was youthful Tory MP, David Cameron.

Prior to this horrific incident, we brought up our family to be kind, caring human beings and to have morals and to trust in the police and justice system. We were so wrong. The first time me and my family needed the police to protect us, they completely destroyed us, without a second thought or care for the lifelong consequences.

Ours was a historical case, allegedly 11 years ago. This crime did not happen, it was totally fabricated. All fantasy. There was no corroborative evidence, as it did not happen. The police and CPS did not conduct a fair and thorough investigation. I know this as I was present at all times and so was my stepson and the accuser's sister. No one interviewed any one of us. All of us, key witnesses as we all know the truth. We were all present. The Merseyside Police were only interested in a conviction. It seems they are conviction chasers, not truth chasers. When challenged about not interviewing key witnesses, they stated that they were guided by the CPS and the CPS did not require them to interview key witnesses. I would like to know why?

It seems the Court of Appeal require new evidence. Evidence that wasn't available at trial. Can you please advise me on how I do this? How do I

get new evidence of a crime that did not happen 11 years ago? That is my task.

Why would you want to convict, innocent, good living, honest people, for crimes that did not happen? There was no corroborative evidence whatsoever. The words 'beyond reasonable doubt' have been removed. Are you aware of that? I wasn't, neither were any of our family or friends. The general public are of the opinion that the words 'beyond reasonable doubt' are included in all trials. That is not true.

The accuser is called the 'victim' and is protected in court. Video links are used and coaching in being a witness is used. Your Secretary of State, Right Honourable Theresa May's culture of 'you will be believed' is being used in courts and juries therefore presume guilt as they must believe the accuser. This is wrong. When the jury believes the accuser before the trial begins, is this not 'presumption of guilt' and against ECHR Article 6, that everyone is entitled to a fair trial and must be presumed innocent?

We were given legal aid, the full cost of which I have now repaid, as I was threatened and bullied that a charge would be placed on my property if I did not make immediate payment. We used a legal aid barrister, who I now know is only required to do the bare minimum. The solicitor that we had was recommended to us by the police. He was the on-call solicitor. We now know that he too, did not have the specialised experience required in these cases.

When these false allegations were made against my husband, the police created evidence by making a video of the accuser who was in distress for some reason; she was also on medication and there was no qualified doctor present. She just nodded her head. The police officer spoke the words and she just nodded. This was shown in court. We had not seen this video. We were only allowed a transcript. There was also a letter from her sister that was read out, that we were not aware of.

The few social reports that they had, were given to our barrister on the morning of the trial. We had not seen them, nor had time to investigate them or challenge them. I have since applied to the police for this video and letter so that I can get an expert to see if it is legal. The police won't allow it without a court order from an appeal judge. Yet I can't get an appeal judge to grant us a court order without finding some new evidence first. I feel that the police are hiding evidence that

could help us with an appeal. Why won't the police help us?

*How wrong were we?*

Your system has destroyed our family. It has let us all down. We trusted your system. We brought our family up to believe in the police and the justice system. How wrong were we?

The appeal court is asking the impossible. Why is that? Is the justice system not there to find the truth? It seems not. I lodged a complaint with the police PS in Feb 2015. Their reply was that they are satisfied with the enquiry.

My innocent husband is now sitting in a cell, convicted of a crime that did not happen. Your justice system has destroyed our family. It has let us all down. We trusted your system. We brought our family up to believe in the police and the justice system. How wrong were we? Only the wealthy, those that can afford the best defence lawyers and barristers have a chance of being found innocent in these cases. Defendants have no chance with inexperienced legal aid lawyers and barristers. Our defence lawyer did not even bother to attend Crown Court once. That's how much effort he put into our case.

The barrister stated 'the system let you down', and then left us to rot.

In these historic sex abuse cases the burden of proof has for some reason been transferred to the defendant from the prosecutor. The accuser is called a victim and the defendant is now presumed guilty as the accuser must be believed. Surely these trials are unfair trials as ECHR state that everyone is entitled to a fair trial and must be presumed innocent. The Government make the laws, the judiciary follow your laws, which is why I am asking you for help.

You have recently made a statement 'there's an industry trying to profit from spurious claims' and you intend to put a stop to it. I sincerely hope that you intend to include the historic sex crimes industry in your mission. Please help us. That's all we are asking. We don't want revenge, we just want our family back. We are entitled to justice too. We are not prepared to be sacrificed by a justice system that allows guilty verdicts on non-existent crimes. There are thousands of innocent people sitting in cells. There are many others who will not come forward as they are terrified that the police will go out trawling for more false accusers, with their dangling carrot of compensa-

tion. Please do something about it. If you can't sort this out, then who can?

*Editor's note: The writer is a member of the BFMS. This article was originally published on the Justice Gap web site on 22 April 2016. It was written to the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, prior to the recent changes in the government's administration following the Brexit referendum.*

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## IN THE NEWS

### Health Minister proposes formal regulation of counsellors and psychotherapists

The Irish Times (1 September 2016) reported that the Minister of Health, Simon Harris, is proposing formal regulation of counsellors and psychotherapists. It is estimated that currently there are approximately 5,000 practitioners in Ireland. The Department of Health has produced a Briefing Paper and invited submissions on the proposals by 30 November 2016. The report states: "There is concern that, in many cases, there is no statutory oversight of their competence and conduct and that some practitioners lack the qualifications and professional training needed to work with such vulnerable clients." The briefing paper is a response to long-standing concerns in Ireland about proper regulation and professional conduct amongst counselling and psychotherapy practitioners.

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### Child Sex Abuse Inquiry plunged into disarray following the resignation of leading lawyers

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) was plunged into disarray following the resignations of three of the Inquiry's lawyers. In separate developments, Elizabeth Prochaska, Ben Emmerson QC and Abigail Bright tendered their resignations. The Inquiry was set up in July 2014 by Theresa May, the Home Secretary at that time. Dame Justice Lowell, a New Zealand Judge, who was the previous chair of the IICSA, resigned in August. Baroness Butler Sloss and Fiona Woolf, previous chairs of the inquiry also resigned. Following these extraordinary developments, the

ability of the inquiry to fulfil its remit is now in question. Mr Emmerson had been suspended from the inquiry, prior to resigning. Professor Alexis Jay, the current chair, is set to appear before the Home Affairs Select Committee to provide an up-date on the progress of the inquiry – which has spent £14.7 million to date. A spokesperson for the IICSA commented: "We are aware that recent events are unsettling, particularly for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and all those who are engaged with the inquiry's work. It has been said that the inquiry is in crisis. This is simply not the case." The IICSA continues to receive dozens of new allegations each week.

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### Sir Cliff Richard to sue the BBC and South Yorkshire Police

Lawyers representing Sir Cliff Richard have commenced legal proceedings in the High Court against the BBC and South Yorkshire Police. Sir Cliff was the subject of a 22 month police investigation into historical allegations of sexual abuse which dated between 1958 and 1983. There were four male complainants. In 2014 the BBC broadcast footage of police searching his Berkshire property. Richard was subsequently interviewed and subjected to a lengthy period on police bail. Earlier this year, the Crown Prosecution Service ruled that there was insufficient evidence to proceed to trial. In a statement, the singer and popular entertainer commented that the allegations were "vile accusations". He proclaimed, further that he was, "named before I was even interviewed", which he described "was like being hung out like live bait". Following a two-year investigation, which reportedly cost £800,000, Richard spent £1,000,000 on legal fees. The complainants have been given lifelong anonymity. According to the Independent Newspaper (19 June 2016), one of the accusing men had previously been arrested for attempting to blackmail Richard. He is also believed to suffer from mental health problems. Geoffrey Robertson QC described the police raid on Sir Cliff's home as untenable. He was treated, Robertson wrote, "as though he were a bank robber or a mass murderer".

#### Thank you

Heartfelt thanks to all who made generous donations in response to our plea for funds. These will help us continue to offer help and support to current and future members.

# BOOK REVIEWS

## **The Memory Illusion: Remembering, Forgetting, and the Science of False Memory**

**Random House, ISBN: 9781847947628; 304pp June 2016**

**by Dr Julia Shaw**

**Price £10.99**

This book makes a definite effort to be approachable. The cover is eye-catching with the use of neon green alongside monochrome. As someone who has never studied psychology, or any form of neuroscience, I was pleased to find that the book was very accessibly written. The use of the personal pronoun throughout, gives Dr Shaw's writing a level of confidence and knowledgeability that addresses the reader directly, making it more likely that they will think favourably of any conclusions she draws. This element of accessibility in the book really reflects how relatable the topic of false memories is to everyone. Certainly not everyone will have come into contact with the more sinister and dangerous side to fictitious memories, but everyone can relate to the idea of remembering something from childhood that they couldn't possibly remember. That being said, Dr Shaw's effort to be relatable can sometimes seem a bit forced, becoming too informal and almost chatty in comparison with some of the more technical paragraphs. These instances, such as the aside about Ira Hyman, can jar slightly. However, it is a difficult task that Dr Shaw is undertaking, especially considering that memory research is not definitive. Sometimes in stressing this lack of certainty alongside multiple conclusions, Dr Shaw's sentences become slightly distorted. Despite these brief moments of confusion, when discussing her own research and more specific aspects of memory research Dr Shaw is very clear and concise. She makes it easy for anyone, regardless of previous psychology knowledge, to engage fully with the discussion. Furthermore, the examples that Dr Shaw introduces are very topical. She looks into the internet phenomenon of #thedress, and magicians. Even though the majority of a magician's audience (over the age of 10) is aware that what they're seeing on stage is not magic, few people, myself included, ever stop to consider the science involved. Dr Shaw high-

lights the similarities between psychology experiments and magic shows, raising interesting questions about perception and the brain's ability to resist manipulation. There having been such a recent and public debate about perception through the phenomenon of #thedress, allows Dr Shaw to present the reader with an undeniable example of how very different people's perception can be. However, it is not merely the use of social media references that makes *The Memory Illusion* eye-opening; the book is written without the shrouding and confusing academic language that so often accompanies scientific books. Dr Shaw doesn't patronisingly dumb down her research, but neither does she place herself in a position of superiority and expect the reader to stumble their way through the book in a state of confusion. She succeeds in creating a wonderful balance between science and humour. The book is extremely interesting and enjoyable to read, which can't always be said of works of non-fiction.

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## **Wrongful Allegations of Sexual and Child Abuse**

**Edited by Dr Ros Burnett**

**Oxford University Press (2016); 336 pp ISBN: 978-0-19-872330-1; Hardback £75.00. 20% discount currently available via promotional leaflet through the BFMS.**

This is a ground-breaking book. It will undoubtedly become a major reference work for criminologists, sociologists, legal researchers and legal professionals. It deserves also to be read by policy makers, parliamentarians and social commentators. Burnett has assembled an impressive list of contributors: leading scholars, legal experts and social commentators. The reality of wrongful convictions and the terrible impact on the lives of the falsely accused and their families is conveyed with poignancy and a sense of immediacy. The arbitrary nature of false allegations are discussed with a clarity that is thought-provoking. In chapter 2, the editor introduces six case studies. These accounts, rich in contextual detail, are moving and it is not an exaggeration to state that they incite horror. The book is divided into five distinct sub sections, each of which delineates the causative, ideological and motivational influences which engender false allegations. The contributors treat these converging themes in a lively and

provocative fashion. Important judicial and legislative changes are considered in a clear and well-reasoned analysis. Shifting attitudinal perceptions to child abuse are brought to the fore with lively and stimulating essays which provide a useful historical context to contemporary policy developments. The closing chapter is bold and strident, laying bare a multitude of factors which can lead to wrongful abuse allegations. Burnett pulls together the central threads of the narrative and shines a torch on significant judicial and legislative changes. The weaknesses of an adversarial criminal justice system, cognitive dissonance, and popular misconceptions about memory are discussed with reasoned argument and balance. An authoritative and ambitious book which exposes the injustice of untrue allegations.

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## **Witness Testimony in Sexual Cases, Evidential, Investigative and Scientific Perspectives**

**Edited by Pamela Radcliffe, Gisli Gudjonsson CBE, Anthony-Heaton Armstrong and David Wolchover**

**Oxford University Press (2016); ISBN: 978-0-19-967293-6**

Witness Testimony in Sexual Cases provides a wide-ranging and lucid analysis of the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences. It is an invaluable source-book for legal practitioners, socio-legal scholars, criminology, law and psychology students. Drawing on valuable and up-to-date research, it provides an international perspective about the assessment of, and the complex issues surrounding witness testimony. There is a good balance between legal and scientific perspectives, emphasising the need to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to better assess and evaluate witness testimony, with impressive contributions on pathological lying and the science of memory. The analysis of these factors is highly accessible and informative. The book provides a crucial historical dimension about developments and policy changes in the criminal justice system, the criminal trial process and the underlying causes of change which help shape recent reforms. It is clearly-written and supported by an array of impressive scientific and legal research. The emphasis on international comparisons and stress on scientific and investigative methodologies make

for a stimulating and thought-provoking analysis. In the light of a dramatic increase in prosecutions regarding historical sexual abuse, this book is also essential reading for prosecutors, defence lawyers and trial judges.

## **LEGAL FORUM**

### **Carol Felstead 2<sup>nd</sup> Inquest**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> inquest into the death of Carol Myers (born Carol Felstead) took place in the Royal Courts of Justice (London) on 30 September 2015. The previous inquest (2005) was quashed in the High Court in December 2014. The presiding judges were Mr Justice Ouseley and His Honour Judge Peter Thornton QC. The 2005 inquest returned an Open Verdict. That inquest was overturned because a key witness, Dr Fisher, was not called to give evidence. On the day of Carol's death Dr Fisher made an emergency 999 phone call to police during which Dr Fisher stated that she was concerned for Carol's welfare and, further, that she believed Carol may have taken an overdose. The judges ruled "that it is necessary and desirable in the interests of justice under Section 13 (1) of the Coroner's Act 1988 (as amended) that another inquest should be held."

Pre-Inquest Review Hearings (PIRHs) were held in March, June and in September – the latter took place immediately before the full inquest. The purpose of the PIRHs was to establish the scope of the inquest, to draw up a witness list and to consider what evidence is available for the court to consider. The remit of an inquest is narrow. Who has died? When did they die? How did they die? Dr Fiona Wilcox (Senior Coroner for Inner West London) presided over the hearings.

Carol died on 29 June 2005; we were informed of her death two weeks later. In the meantime, Dr Fisher had removed the contents of Carol's flat, taken out temporary insurance on Carol's car so she could drive it to her home in Plymouth. Dr Fisher had also arranged a cremation service which was scheduled to take place the day after my brother received a telephone call from the Coroner's Officer informing him that Carol had died (we cancelled the cremation service and Carol received a family burial in Stockport). Dr Fisher also passed a document to the police and coroner which stated that Carol had been abused emotionally, physically and sexually from birth. The document (which was not signed or dated)

alleged that my parents were the leaders of a Satanic Cult responsible for the worst crimes bar genocide. According to the document, the central traumatic events of Carol's life were as follows: "At three years of age, my mother smothered my sister who was born with Down's Syndrome; she sat me on top of her and then set the house on fire ... It was around this age that I first recalled being Satanically abused. The shock of stumbling upon the gowns that they wore left me mute until the age of five ... The abuse continued in a ritualistic way and occurred mainly on religious days; it involved snuff films, drugs, prostitution and alcohol; and went on until my late twenties ... During that time, I became pregnant from the age of eleven onwards and endured several abortions which were consequently sacrificed."

It is important to pinpoint these citations as they provide crucial contextual detail regarding the events of 2005 which form the background to the 2<sup>nd</sup> inquest. However I do not propose to dwell further on these claims because they have been comprehensively demolished in 28 newspaper articles on the case, in a book and on the Justice for Carol website. The main objection to these fantastical claims is that they are impossible. For example, Carol hadn't been born when some of the alleged events were supposed to have taken place.

It is an understatement to write that, following 11 years of protracted – and exhaustive - enquiries initiated by my family including, in no particular order, a 15 month police investigation after we complained about Dr Fisher; a General Medical Council investigation; a coroner's inquiry; a housing association investigation; several further police investigations with three different police forces; three independent police complaint investigations (IPCC); several further investigations involving the directorate of legal services in New Scotland Yard; an inquiry initiated through my MP which involved Boris Johnson MP and Theresa May MP(now Prime Minister); the application to the Attorney General to quash the inquest, followed subsequently by an application to the High Court; and a protracted complaint against one of Carol's therapists; numerous, drawn-out inquiries to obtain Carol's psychiatric and medical records, that we were looking forward to our day in court.

Our aims were straightforward. We sought to find out exactly why Carol died (aged 41); we wanted to hear Dr Fisher's evidence; we wanted the errors, omissions and mistakes from the first inquest to be acknowledged and, where possible,

put right. Carol's psychiatric history had been downplayed in the previous inquest. Her physical and mental health were mutually entwined. It was vital that the new coroner's inquiry give equal weight to both. Dr Fisher told police in 2005 that Carol may have taken an overdose; in consequence her mental health and state of mind prior to her death were of paramount importance. From the outset, the situation in court was frustrating. To assist the court, I had prepared a family statement and a detailed 'bundle' of supporting information, together with photographs of Carol from childhood and early adulthood. The information contained relevant medical and psychiatric records, press clippings on the case, scholarly articles about false memory, together with detailed information pertaining to the police investigations we had initiated in our quest to better understand the key events of Carol's life and premature death. It took several months to collate the information and to create a contents page for ease of reference. In our campaign to uncover the detail about Carol's life and death, we learnt how to present a strong case supported by factual evidence. In sum, we attempted to provide the court with as much relevant, factual documentation as was humanly possible with the caveat, of course, that the information must be focused, pertinent and summarised.

From the outset, the senior coroner stressed that the inquest would focus primarily around the events of 29 June 2005. Carol's mental health, the false history of her life, allegations of Satanic Ritual Abuse were background factors only. The detailed evidence I'd collated and submitted to the Coroner was deemed to be beyond the remit of the inquest. It felt like pulling teeth. By the time of the second PIRH, my whole family were sceptical in the extreme about the forthcoming inquest. Identification photographs were missing; scene of crime photographs could not be located; the coroner's officer would not be called to give live evidence; a police inspector had retired and would not appear at the inquest. It was beginning to feel like a re-run of the 2005 inquest. Our communications with the coroner's office deteriorated to the point that we submitted a detailed complaint to the Ministry of Justice and gave serious consideration to withdrawing from the proceedings, as is documented in detailed correspondence between ourselves and the coroner's legal officer. There was also the very serious matter of contempt of court – which we had to avoid, at all costs.

On 23 September – one week prior to the inquest – we received copies of the witness statements.

This included medical reports about the state of Carol's health before her death, including a meticulous toxicology report. Carol was taking prescribed morphine and the toxicologist stated that a standard test to detect illicit drugs had not been undertaken in 2005. It was not possible to state with any conviction if Carol had overdosed on morphine. Exhumation would not provide an answer to this question because morphine degenerates over time. Dr Fisher submitted a 106 page statement taken by police. 87 pages were redacted. Some of the information, moreover, in the pages that were not redacted was incorrect. For example Dr Fisher stated (and testified in court) that she first met Carol on a sunny Sunday afternoon in June 2005. I was impressed by her clear recollection of this event. She said that Carol sought counselling about the death of her grandmother. But there was a major problem with this: Carol's grandmother hadn't died – she was still alive at the time. That meant that the grounds given for Dr Fisher's very first meeting with Carol were false. However, because of the extremely narrow remit of the inquest set by the coroner, it was not possible to pursue the matter. Our contention can be supported by checking my grandmother's death certificate, a copy of which, of course, we possess. There can be no misunderstanding on this point. The dates are irreconcilable.

We had waited 11 years to hear Dr Fisher's testimony. We were appalled that her statement was heavily redacted. Dr Fisher gave evidence by video link. There was a light above her head; it was difficult to see her face. The quality of the sound was poor. Prior to the inquest, my brother Richard announced that he would not be attending because, in his opinion, the proceedings would be a whitewash. The national press were in attendance, but they were not allowed to sit in the press office. However the inquest received wide press coverage. A second Open Verdict was returned. The cause of Carol's death is unknown. From my perspective, the inquest generated more questions than it answered. When we reflected on the process and after paying careful consideration to the inquest transcripts and audio recording, the inquest seemed full of anomalies, generating more questions than answers. At the time of writing, David Felstead is preparing a fresh application to the Attorney General to overturn the second inquest.

Kevin Felstead

*The views expressed in this article are personal and may not be representative of the BFMS.*

## **Mother seeks legal redress in High Court Landmark Case**

A mother who accused a therapist of brainwashing and manipulating her daughter went to the High Court to seek release of police statements held by the Metropolitan Police Service. She believes that her daughter developed false memories of childhood abuse following therapy sessions. The therapist, Anne Craig, was questioned by police in August 2014. The Crown Prosecution Service ruled that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute for fraud. Ann Craig denied any wrong-doing. Counsel for Amanda Cayzer, the Countess of Caledon, addressing the High Court in July said: "My client's case is that the evidence she has obtained from investigations discloses a methodology whereby memories or events are falsely and deliberately implanted in the minds of impressionable, perhaps vulnerable, young women."

The case was later heard by Mrs Justice Slade in September 2016. The senior judge rejected the claims and ordered her to pay legal costs. She ruled: "Little perceptible benefit would likely to be gained from disclosure and public policy consideration in maintaining confidentiality in statements and material obtained by in the police investigation overwhelmingly outweigh the arguments in favour of disclosure."

Ms Cayzer's daughter began therapy sessions with Anne Craig in 2010, aged 21. She has since become estranged from her family. In August 2014, Lady Caledon wrote a letter to her daughter expressing concern about "the potential for emotional psychological abuse through therapy." She employed the services of a private investigator who interviewed a number of Anne Craig's former clients. Mrs Justice Slade rejected a claim by Countess Caledon that she had suffered "indirect harassment" in consequence of her daughter allegedly developing false memories. Summing up, she ruled: "There is no evidence that the applicant suffered psychiatric or psychological harm as the result of the actions of Mrs Craig." Lady Caledon's daughter sat in the public gallery with Mrs Craig throughout the hearing. The countess issued a statement which said that she would continue to seek further redress to reconcile her family and daughter.

Further information about this case is available on the home page of the BFMS web site.

## Overseas False Memory Societies

Please feel free to write or phone if you have relatives in these countries who would like to receive local information. The American and Australian groups produce newsletters.

### AUSTRALIA

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