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# The Forgotten Rebels Of The Eureka Stockade: Women

Huffington Post Australia | By [Libby-Jane Charleston](#)

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The Eureka Stockade was one of the most important historical events in Australia; seen as a major development in our democracy. December 3, 1854 was when goldfield workers (known as diggers) rebelled against the government, which was demanding they pay a special licence fee; whether or not they found any gold.

In Ballarat, Victoria, there were 25,000 diggers of various nationalities on the goldfields. Diggers were worried about corruption and the lack of help from police. It all came to a head when a Scottish digger was bashed to death by a group of men, including a local publican, James Bentley. Bentley was friends with the magistrate and managed to escape prosecution, along with three others.

This attack was followed by the burning of Bentley's pub, scores of meetings, petitions, the creation of the Southern Cross flag (seen as the Eureka flag) and eventually an attack on the stockade leading to the death of 22 diggers.

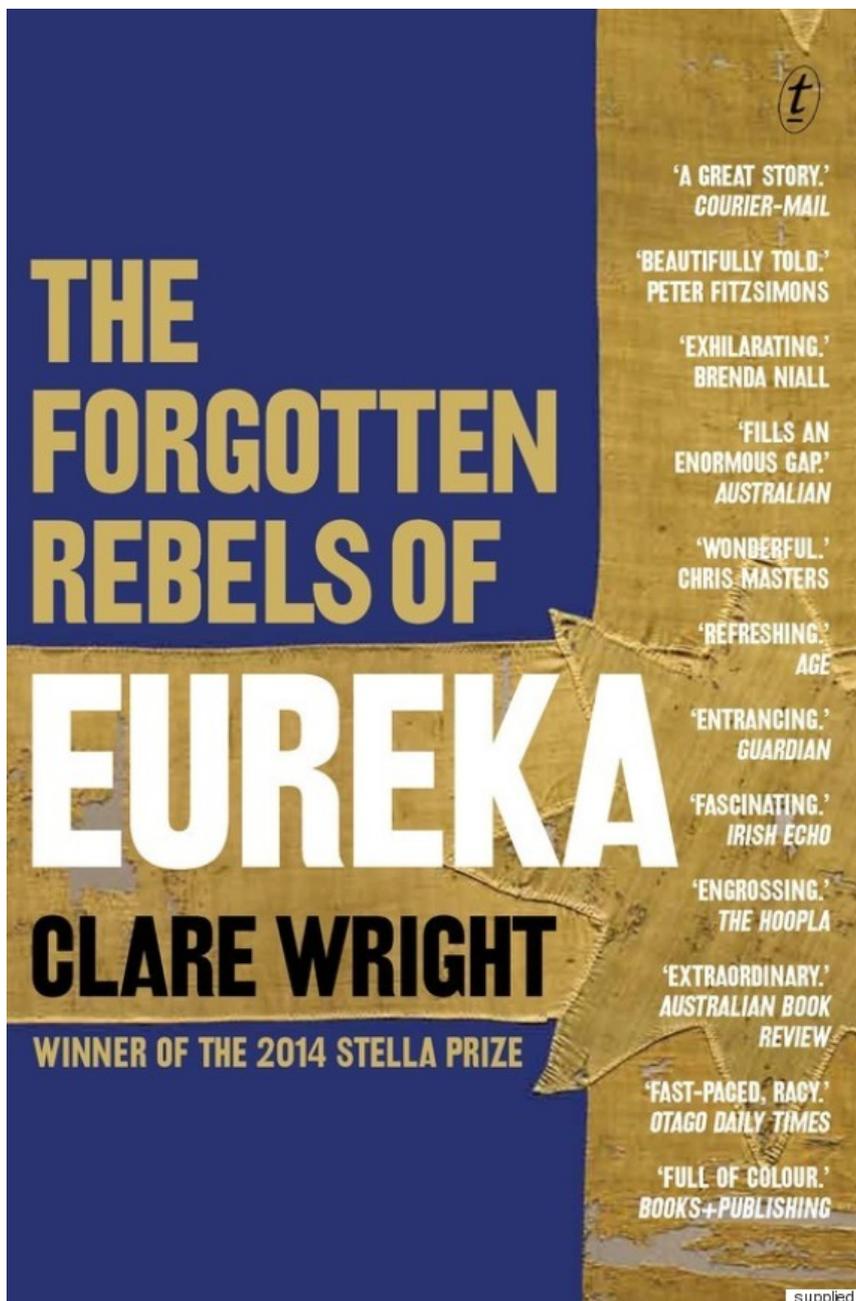
The Eureka Stockade has been taught at Australian schools for decades. But there has always been one fact missing: women were also involved. Ten years in the making, award-winning historian and author Dr Clare Wright's book, The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka is now going to be part of the high school curriculum. It's also being made into a six-part TV series.



*Historian & author Clare Wright. Picture supplied*

“A third of the Ballarat population was women and kids, including working families and a lot of single women. While the men weren’t getting any gold, the women were starting businesses, serving the mining community, working as cooks or cleaners,” Dr Wright said.

“They were commercially, economically and culturally involved in the community. They were also integral in organising the rebellion. Eureka was a community protest. They were protesting on behalf of their community, a lack of justice, lack of political expression and the inability to do anything about it.”



*Clare Wright's book The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka. Picture supplied*

Dr Wright was inspired to write *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka* in the aftermath of her book *Beyond the Ladies Lounge: Australia's female publicans*.

"When I was writing that book there were stories about a woman called Mrs Bentley who ran Bentley's hotel in Victoria. I studied Eureka in high school and I was taught that it was the male miners against the male military. So where does this Mrs Bentley fit in? If there are flags sewn by women were there more of them, and how many more?" Wright said.

"One thing I found in the pub study is that women have been very close to the epicentre of important moments because often these things happen in pubs and pubs were often run by women. The burning of Bentley's pub is seen as a precursor to Eureka."



*Goldminers' camp, Ballarat Victoria, around the time of the Eureka Stockade in 1854. Eureka. Picture supplied*

"I was very curious and my hunch was there was more to this story than we've been told. As I investigated further it was clear that women were at the forefront of the movement, from getting petitions going, writing letters to the editor, Ellen Young wrote inflammatory poetry. Another woman was the newspaper editor of the Ballarat Times. I found that women were providing accommodation for meetings, one woman was the chief financial backer of the diggers' movement. The women were there, boots and all, and in the stockade, one woman was killed as well."

"My book also portrays the men as not 'lone figures' as they've been portrayed in historical books. They were husbands, fathers, brothers and sons. So, in terms of their relationship to women, it changes the nature of their motivation. They were fighting for their families and the future. Most of them made enormous sacrifices and they were treated appallingly."



*The Eureka flag. Picture supplied*

Dr Wright told HuffPost Australia it's about getting the story straight -- and it makes for a much more compelling, important story.

Wright is thrilled her book will be reaching a wider audience; not only on the high school curriculum but as a TV show.

"In stories like this, when not much has been known about the women's involvement, many authors just make up a fictional character, especially when the story becomes a movie. Remember 'Ned Kelly' starring Heath Ledger? Naomi Watts' character was fiction -- the writers made up her character because not much was known about the women behind the Kelly Gang.

"Adding women to historical stories doesn't just add colour, it changes the whole outline."

The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka, won the 2014 Stella Prize and the 2014 NIB Award for Literature, was a finalist for the Walkley Book Award

and was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's, WA Premier's and Queensland Literary Awards, the NSW Premier's History Awards and the Victorian Community History Awards.

The book has recently been published in a Young Adult edition as We Are The Rebels and TV and film rights to Forgotten Rebels have been sold to production company Ruby Entertainment, producers of the award-winning ABC mini-series, The Secret River.

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