



The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka

Clare Wright

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The Eureka Stockade. The story is one of Australia's foundation legends, but until now it has been told as though only half the participants were there.

What if the hot-tempered, free-wheeling gold miners we learnt about in school were actually husbands and fathers, brothers and sons? And what if there were women and children inside the Eureka Stockade, defending their rights while defending themselves against a barrage of bullets?

As Clare Wright reveals, there were thousands of women on the goldfields and many of them were active in pivotal roles. The stories of how they arrived there, why they came and how they sustained themselves make for fascinating reading in their own right. But it is in the rebellion itself that the unbiddable women of Ballarat come into their own.

Groundbreaking, absorbing, crucially important—The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka is the uncut story of the day the Australian people found their voice.

The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka Details

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Author : Clare Wright

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From Reader Review The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka for online ebook

Text Publishing says

'The best source on women at Eureka.'

Big Smoke

'This is a wonderful book. At last an Australian foundation story where women are not only found, but are found to have played a fundamental role.'

Chris Masters

'Brilliantly researched and fun to read. An exhilarating new take on a story we thought we knew.'

Brenda Niall

'Fascinating revelations. Beautifully told.'

Peter FitzSimons

'Lively, incisive and timely, Clare Wright's account of the role of women in the Eureka Stockade is an engrossing read. Assembling a tapestry of voices that vividly illuminate the hardscrabble lives endured on Ballarat's muddy goldfields, this excellent book reveals a concealed facet of one of Australia's most famous incidences of colonial rebellion. For once, Peter Lalor isn't the hero: it's the women who are placed front and centre... The Forgotten Rebels links the actions of its heroines to the later fight for female suffrage, and will be of strong relevance to a contemporary female audience. Comprehensive and full of colour, this book will also be essential reading for devotees of Australian history.'

Bookseller and Publisher

'The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka offers us a full cast of flesh-and-blood women who belong in any telling of the Eureka story, and in any account of Australian goldfields life.'

Robyn Annear, Monthly

'Clare Wright's revisionary history of the Eureka stockade is immediately entrancing. A social history of the Ballarat goldfields in Victoria circa 1854, it recreates the landscape as one of bustling domesticity, commerce, theatre and constantly shifting authority. It is a far cry from the stories and images of my school history books which portrayed a shanty town of tents and men.'

Guardian

'Beautifully written, her book takes readers on a vivid journey of what life was like for the families of the miners, merchants, prostitutes and police in a landscape that had been totally annihilated by the race to dig up gold... It's a great story.'

Courier Mail

'This history is based on impeccable research.... The book makes a strong case for the forgotten rebels of Eureka, and it brings to life the experiences of so many young immigrants to Australia in the 1850s. It has been handsomely produced with illustrations, detailed references and index, making it an excellent addition to libraries. Women, in particular, will enjoy this refreshing new look at Eureka, that champions the female role in the development of Australian democracy.'

Sydney Morning Herald/Saturday Age

'Fascinating.'

Irish Echo

'With her new book The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka, historian Dr. Clare Wright has taken a huge step towards a more truthful examination of the Stockade and its players... What this book does is lay down a new way for women...to view themselves, and for all of us to understand our past through truth rather than reliance on myth.'

King's Tribune

'A must-have book to add to your collection. Comprehensively researched, thoroughly illuminating account of the hardships, highlights and the sheer determination of the women of Eureka that shaped our national consciousness.'

Nicole Maher, Great Escape Books

'Not only has [Clare Wright's] research shown that women were working alongside the male miners as shopkeepers, laundresses, housekeepers and prostitutes—often as the primary breadwinner—it enabled Wright to resurrect some “extraordinary” female characters who were leaders in the movement.'

AEU News

'Whether you enjoy lively stories about goldfields, women's history, colonial attitudes or workers' civil rights, there's something for everyone in this freshly researched and colourfully told account.'

NZ Listener

'Extraordinary...There is so much to be learned from her prodigality of content...not just about the role of women of women in Eureka and on the goldfields...but also about Australian society.'

Australian Book Review

'As Wright points out, for too long Eureka has been a masculine myth. Women's presence has never been fully explored. Indeed, their absence has been assumed. Her work fills an enormous gap. Furthermore, The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka supports her claim that women's presence does not just add colour to the picture, it changes the very outline.'

Weekend Australian

'In The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka [Wright] presents a refreshing take on the 1854 rebellion, by sharing the untold stories of the men, women and children who were there.'

Walkley Magazine

Michael Livingston says

This is the kind of book the Stella Prize is all about - something I'd never have picked up without the prompt of the long list that turned out to be a fascinating account of a moment in Australia's history I knew surprisingly little about. In focussing on the role of women, Wright shifts the story from the standard outline we all learned about at school and brings new and intriguing insight to bear on the goldfields, the Eureka movement and the nascent women's rights movement of the time. It's long and at times dry, but there's a lot to like here.

Lisa says

I must have learnt about the Eureka Stockade sometime during my time at school. But, like my most topics, it was remembered vaguely, not even at half-strength. I could paint the event broadly (the flag, miners' rights, Peter Lalor, *tragedy*) and felt very familiar with the nameless, faceless cast of characters: cruelty male authority and the rebels, typical Aussie battlers: standing up for a fair go, fighting against enormous odds for justice and, also, yes, male. That women were ever involved in this iconic Australian event never occurred to me until I saw *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka* on the bookshop shelves.

Clare Wright recalls a similar reaction, stumbling across women as she began to push closer to Eureka. As a student in an all-girls' school, taught history by women, she asks: "why did not *one* of us ever think to ask, where are *we* in this story?"

But, as Wright concludes, "the women of Eureka have always been there" and her book seeks out to explore their lives and to see one of Australian history's defining moments through the perspectives and experiences of those the historical record has glossed over.

That Wright has been successful is obvious from the awards, nominations and praise that the front cover of this edition make clear. Her writing is clear, precise, evocative and occasionally humorous, making the act of reading easy and delightful — but without sacrificing historical integrity. Wright is able to bring the people she writes about to life, without it feeling like she's delving into fiction.

Wright's narrative doesn't require the reader to have an extensive understanding of the Eureka Stockade either. Prior to starting this book, this was something I was concerned about — as noted above, my own understanding was poor and I didn't want to find myself struggling because of the gaps in my own knowledge. However, I found that Wright's approach provided me with enough information that I could comprehend the events leading up to the Stockade and to appreciate the new light Wright sheds on them.

The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka does more than merely writing women back into the Eureka narrative. It explores **their** narrative. What it was like to come out to Australia in hope of making a fortune in the gold rush, to arrive in Melbourne and journey up to Ballarat, what it meant to live as the wives of miners, the freedoms the goldfields offered – and yes, what it meant to be a woman caught up with the rebellion and it's tragic ending.

Occasionally, there are stumbles in this book — times when I thought Wright was reaching with her theories, but these were few enough and the book so good that it didn't really impact my enjoyment of it.

There is a boldness in this narrative, but it is a tempered boldness. Wright doesn't try to reinvent the story of the Eureka Stockade, sticking to facts and (reasonably) credible theories, but she is unapologetic about the history she reveals.

"The great gift of Eureka," Wright writes in her preface, "is that the story of women's effort, influence and sacrifice is both politically correct and historically true."

The same could be said of her own account.

Alison says

This book didn't entirely come together for me, and I'm not entirely sure why. Wright retells the story of the Eureka Stockade focusing on the experiences of the women involved. Possibly the story would work better for someone intimately familiar with the Eureka story, but for me, with only the barest remembrances of the main cast of characters it felt too disjointed to be an effective retelling. The themes, of gender norms in flux, were more occasional suggestions thrown out than fully explored. In the end the book felt neither fish nor fowl, neither straightforward retelling nor thematic exploration, and left me unsatisfied.

By far the biggest strength of the book was the sense of atmosphere on the goldfields that it conjures up. And on this alone, it earns three stars. The community of diggers and diggers wives, military men and families, and local commerce comes sharply to life. Like a lot of Australians I'm descended from gold rush emigrants who cut their Australian teeth in the 1850s goldfields, and to get a sense of what life was like for them was cool

MsEleanorMae says

Bloody brilliant - should be a mandatory read in schools.

Yvonne Perkins says

This book is bold. A bed-time story this ain't. Its prose slaps you around the face to make sure you are paying attention. It is assertive and provocative. It sucks you into the time that was, on the Ballarat goldfields of the mid-nineteenth century.

The history of Victoria's gold rushes and the Eureka Stockade is one of Australia's well-worn foundational stories. Each year the story is told in school classrooms throughout Australia and children dutifully do their Gold Rush project with varying degrees of interest. Students are told about the flood of people from all over the world rushing to Australia to find gold. They learn about the crowded diggings, about the mass communities of tents which suddenly appeared only to be taken down in great haste when rumour told of a find of gold somewhere else. The lessons go on to tell the story of the miners' grievances about the compulsory miners' licence and their complaints about their treatment by authorities on the gold field. They culminate in the rebellion known as Eureka Stockade and the deaths of miners and soldiers after a raid on the Stockade by government forces.

This story could be interesting but the only memory I have of my grade five Gold Rush lessons is how deadly dull they were. One of my daughters didn't see the point of the project at all. Yet to my surprise a few months ago the same child, now an adult, told me how much she enjoyed reading an academic article about the Gold Rush for her first year university history course. The article was by Clare Wright, the author of *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*. I was aware of the impending release of her book but the fact that Wright's academic writing had excited a student who had a personal history of thorough disinterest in Gold Rush history made me eager to read the book...

You can read the rest of my review on my blog, *Stumbling Through the Past*.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

‘The women of Eureka have always been there.’

This book is focussed on the period between the discovery of gold at Ballarat in 1851 until the aftermath of the Eureka Stockade in 1854. Dr Wright also provides a domestic and international context for the events in Ballarat as well as referencing other instances where women became politically mobilised (such as during the French Revolution). When I first learned about Eureka at school almost half a century ago, the only names used were male, the only pronouns masculine. The events at the Eureka Stockade were, we were told, the beginning of Australian democracy, a recognition that there should be no taxation without representation. The Eureka Stockade is the only Australian example of an armed rebellion leading to reform of unfair laws. The term ‘digger’ was later adopted by the ANZAC soldiers in World War I. The wording of the resolution passed by the diggers on the 11th of November 1854 still echoes in my memory: that it was ‘the inalienable right of every citizen to have a voice in making the laws he is called on to obey, that taxation without representation is tyranny.’ It didn’t occur to me then to wonder where the women were.

‘Women were there. They mined for gold and much else of economic value besides. They paid taxes. They fought for their rights. And they were killed in the crossfire of a nascent new world order.’

Dr Wright’s research led her to discover there were 5165 women in Ballarat in December 1854, and 6356 children. And at least one of those women died during the Stockade.

This book provides an engrossing account of the events leading up to, and immediately after, the Eureka Stockade. The accounts of lives lived (and lost) on the muddy goldfields. Women as agitators, fund-raisers and petitioners. Women as wives and mothers. Women conducting business and mining for gold. A number of women become the book’s main characters. Those women include: Martha Clendenning, the storekeeper and doctor’s wife; Margaret Johnston, the young wife of Assistant Gold Commissioner James Johnston; actress and theatre-manager Sarah Hamner; and Clara Seekamp, who acted as publisher of the Ballarat Times.

I found this book fascinating: it made me think about aspects of the Eureka Stockade I’d never before considered (including the role of women and the dispossession of the indigenous inhabitants). It also reminded me of the relative recency of representative democracy in Australia, and the continuing struggles over land ownership and use. I’d recommend this book to anyone seeking to look at the Eureka Stockade from another perspective.

‘It’s what happened after the surrender that really matters.’

Dr Clare Wright won the 2014 Stella Prize for this book.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Jess says

I grew up in Ballarat and frankly was told a very different narrative concerning Eureka. Wright 's extensive research puts the whole saga into context and show the extent to which history can be manipulated. A very thorough, enlightening account of Eureka. Highly recommended.

Librariasaurus says

I really liked all the stuff I learned while reading this book.

Think of it as a feminist history of the Eureka stockade. This is a Stella prize winning work of non-fiction, but I'm not entirely sure that all the women in this book were forgotten. There seemed to be quite a lot of information available for people who were supposedly forgotten.

There were a lot of people to learn about and it was pretty amazing the things they managed to accomplish in a time where women were constantly undervalued. But there wasn't much time spent on most people so they were very hard to keep track of.

My major criticism was that very little of the book was actually devoted to the stockade itself, which I don't feel I've learned much more about after reading this book.

There's no denying that Claire Wright has written an amazing feminist history of what I think is an under-taught area of Australian history.

I would recommend this to anyone who wants to know more about women in history in Australia, and boy do I want to go to Ballarat now.

Colleen says

This book is an extraordinary piece of work worthy of all the praises that have been heaped on it and more. Clare Wright has done meticulous and illuminating research, and passed it on via a beautifully crafted and gripping tale. It is in my top 3 for the year.

Joseph Bevitt says

I assume that like myself, most Australian's are not familiar with the actual events that culminated in the Eureka stockade and the impact it had on union movements, and democracy in Australia. The Eureka legend has been hyper-masculinised, with the role of women in the goldfields all but deleted from national history. This exhaustively researched book, a result of a PhD thesis, serves to accurately reset the record on what has ultimately become a historical fiction.

This book also works at length to investigate the synthesis of the "Australia flag", now known as the "Eureka flag". A beautiful design that held so much meaning for those who created it, and whose symbolism was

utterly unique when compared to the patriotic flags of the Empires of the time.

From 2018, companies face being banned from doing any federal building work in Australia "if employees display the Eureka flag or union slogans on employer-supplied clothing and equipment". Offending material, specifically includes images generally attributed to, or associated with an organisation, such as the iconic symbol of the five white stars and white cross on the Eureka Stockade flag". This ban is a result of government restrictions on workers showing support for the CFMEU.

Current politics aside, the Eureka flag as a symbol has been claimed by many organisations over the years, as has the stockade itself. A re-education of the nation on the impacts of the stockade would have this flag venerated instead of banned. As such, this book is an excellent candidate as a core text in history or english classes. I commend the efforts of those in parliament who are trying, like Clare Wright, to reclaim Eureka for what it is - "the birthplace of the Australian spirit of mateship ... a victory of self-reliant individuals over big government ... and excessive taxation."

Lastly, I was completely surprised to learn through this book that women's rights in Australia were accelerated toward equalisation during the Gold Rush years. Only after the collapse of the Gold Rush period did Australian society's dictate on women's inequality truly come into force. We have come a long way, but further progress is still necessary.

An excellent read.

Bec says

Wright chronicles the events and mood of the Victorian goldfields leading up to and after the Eureka Stockade, shedding light on women's participation on the goldfields. Wright persuasively argues that the social, economic and political structures of the goldfields provided the context for women to aspire to political citizenship and economic emancipation. It's a fascinating account that remains prescient, particularly in analogies between goldrush immigrants and refugees. It's also a great reminder of the very different histories of NSW and Victoria that remain evident in today's political discourse.

Kate says

To be perfectly frank, the Australian gold rush history I learnt at school was dull. We suffered through it for the excursion to Sovereign Hill, of which the highlights were having personalised 'Wanted' posters printed and spending a vast amount of money on boiled lollies. I'm sure we covered stuff about living conditions, the growth of Ballarat, and the far-reaching effects of the miners' protests about compulsory licences... I probably filed it under 'Oh yeah, that was the Eureka Stockade', and moved on to Sovereign Hill's chief attraction - panning for gold.

Imagine if I'd been taught from Clare Wright's *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka* ? It's a spectacular, riveting book that gives an account of the events leading up to the Eureka Stockade from the perspective of individual women on the gold fields. Until Wright's book, women had been left out of the Gold Rush and Eureka story, despite the fact that they played a significant role and in turn shaped Victorian history.

Notably, traditional gender roles were challenged. Women were lease and land holders (for example, public licences required a female on the lease, the logic being that a female presence would keep behaviour in check). Women ran businesses, mined for gold, and in terms of marriage, could afford to be very picky (they were the minority, hence they did the choosing). Equally, men were required to do things they weren't accustomed to doing. In a letter to his mother, miner Henry reports *"I'm a first-rate washerwoman, or if the lasses like, washerman..."*.

The events on the gold fields represented the first gains for Victorian suffragettes - *"They did not want to change the system of government, they wanted to be included in it."* Wright's vivid description of the political environment is interwoven with the everyday - the bitter Ballarat winters, the birth (and loss) of babies, the fashions favoured by those who had struck gold.

Wright demonstrates that there's no need for history books to be dry and plain. *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka* is exquisitely written and has flourishes you don't expect. Women were left in *"...forsaken towns like the soapy ring around a bathtub"* while their husbands rushed to get to the gold fields. On the influence and importance of immigrants, Wright says -

...the ideas, aspirations and language of the old world seeped into the porous new cultural and political landscape. Seen from this angle, the Victorian gold rush doesn't represent a new dawn in Australia's young history so much as the long dusk of Europe's age of revolutions.

This is an embarrassingly paltry review of what is an epic book. In short, it's absorbing, informative and memorable (and a worthy Stella Prize winner).

4/5 I need a post-book trip to Ballarat.

Dale Harcombe says

The Eureka Stockade is an interesting point in Australia's history and yet one I suspect many people know very little about. Even what we may know is probably skewed. *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka* seeks to redress this problem by recognising the part women and children played in the development of Ballarat. Until now it seems to have been pretty much assumed women and families were not thereon the gold fields. Clare Wright has researched extensively and involved ample evidence to prove this was not the case. Almost a quarter of the on the gold fields at Ballarat were female. In fact, the Chinese were considered strange because they did not bring their women with them.

This book is no sugar coating of nostalgia but gives the reality of what life was like for those on the diggings. I loved the way Clare Wright brought the past to life in the small details and assured us that, 'for all of us the past is a whisper away.' That whisper is made louder as she details items from diaries and letters of the time. Just one example is that of Ellen Campbell, who shared her grandmother's diary. Her grandmother Margaret Brown Howden Johnston was married to Assistant Resident Gold commissioner James Johnston n. She was pregnant with their first child while living at Ballarat. Yet her granddaughter was not invited to the 150th anniversary of Eureka. The book is littered with many fascinating stories that have not been told till now.

The focus has for too long has been on the diggers and not their wives and families who experienced the hardships with them. For anyone with an interest in Australian history this gives a fascinating account of

events leading up to the Eureka Stockade. As you read, you can almost feel yourself working with the women to sew the flag and then marching from Bakery Hill to Eureka. Mrs Shann led the group that consisted of not just miners but their wives and children. A crowd of five hundred agreed 'to stand truly by each other, and fight to defend our rights and liberties.'

So the book goes on filling in the gaps as the diggers and their wives and families sought to protect their rights. Some of the descriptions of what happened at the Stockade are brutal and show the inhumanity of the soldiers. Other stories show the humanity of one human being to another and how some women risked their own lives to help others. This book gives a vivid picture of both and will leave you wondering how many other aspects of our history have been given skewed versions that did not show the involvement of women. Given the amount of research involved and the material included in this book I am not surprised to hear that Clare Wright said it was ten year in the making. It was worth it as it is a valuable resource and insight into the times.

Sue says

If you're not Australian, you may not have heard of the Eureka Stockade. It was a significant event in colonial Australia's march to democracy and independence, involving the British army and police attacking a stockade created by miners whose grievances included the payment of a compulsory miner's licence and the fact that this licence, which they saw as a form of taxation, did not give them the right to vote in the legislature. It has traditionally been framed in masculine terms, but Wright discovered, somewhat by accident while researching another project (as historians do!), a new angle – the role of women in the rebellion.

For my full review, please see: <https://whisperinggums.com/2014/11/09...>
