Granny rises from the grave for Women’s Day

Description

Warrnambool textile artist Louise Parlour with her work inspired by the story of Agnes Ruttleton: the 'Granny' behind the famous Granny's Grave.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] A [/dropcap]lmost 170 years after she was laid to rest somewhere in the Warrnambool sand dunes, **Agnes Ruttleton** – the "Granny" behind Granny's Grave – is to get her name back.

The Warrnambool City Council has followed through on its plan to have a plaque recognising pioneer Agnes Ruttleton added to the famous Granny's Grave site at the east end of Lady Bay and has installed it in time for March 8: International Women's Day.

Until now, Agnes has been incorrectly known only as Mrs James Raddleston, "the first white woman buried in Warrnambool" and thousands of locals and tourists have walked past her memorial in the dunes not knowing anything more about her.

Last year, however, *Bluestone Magazine* ran a story on the research of local historian **Jenny Fawcett** that revealed so much more about the life and times of Granny Ruttleton, who died in 1848 at the age of 60. It remains one of our most popular stories and you can read it here.

The headstone in detail, created using 10.5km of cotton and finished with real lichen picked from the roof of Louise's home.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] A [/dropcap]mong those inspired by Agnes' story was Warrnambool textile artist **Louise Parlour,** who used the imagery of the Granny's Grave bluestone headstone for her entry in the inaugural South West International Women's Day Art Prize.

"The theme for the art prize was 'Women and Place' and I think the Granny's Grave story fits that so perfectly," Louise said.

"So many people walk past that site and never really stop to look. Plus (Agnes) is not actually buried there and they have her name wrong, so it is like she is invisible, despite being one of the first pioneering women of Warrnambool."

Louise photographed the headstone and used this to create a template from dissolvable plastic. Around this template she freehand embroidered the headstone using the closest colour she could find to bluestone.

The work took about 50 hours and 10.5 km – yes, *10.5 km* – of cotton to complete.

"I think I bought about every batch of that cotton I could get my hands on in Warrnambool," Louise laughed.

The completed work, including a poem about Agnes Raddleton's life inside a piece of recycled marine ply.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] T [/dropcap]he gravestone's green lettering was then stencilled on to the work, some real lichen added from Louise's roof at home and the whole thing covered with a thin coat of PVC glue to hold it together once the dissolvable plastic was removed.

The headstone itself is surrounded by sand and pussy willows, boxed by recycled fence pickets from a friend.

"I wanted it to look like I imagine it did when it was first erected, not with the modern handrails and things around it," Louise said.

As part of sharing Agnes's story with the public, Louise wrote a poem encapsulating what is known of her life and included this in her piece, tucked inside a piece of weathered marine ply.

"I want people to pick it up, read it and go away knowing a bit more about Agnes," she said.

[learn_more caption="You can read Louise's poem here:"]

Where is this woman?

Laid to rest

Windswept dunes

Leaving no remnants

No trace…….

No photos to be found

Only our imaginations

Giving Granny a face.

A pioneer woman of her day

A township of 100 people

So they say…..

Makeshift homes set up

Enduring the wind and rain

On Flagstaff Hill

Where the sheep today roam.

So who is this Granny?

Encapsulated in time

A bluestone grave

Neither reason nor rhyme

Standing all alone

Standing the test of time……

Not much is known about Granny

And her pioneer days

Agnes sailed by sea

From Tasmania

Aboard the Essington

Wife of James

No record of children

The colony of New South Wales

Town of Warrnambool……

Worked hard for a quid

Odd jobs and selling crays

Headstone depicts wrong name

Should read – Mrs Agnes Ruttleton

Second white woman

To be buried in Warrnambool

First believed to be buried on an island

Off the Hopkins River

Granny was admired by one Richard Osburne

Known as a publisher and local historian

Paid for her burial

In the sand dunes……

Returning some years later

To no avail

Could not find her marker

And all efforts failed

Richard Osburne fought

Council decided to erect a headstone

The one that stands today All alone……..

Louise Parlour 2015

(I would like to acknowledge Bluestone Magazine and their article “Who is the “Granny” behind Granny’s Grave?” published February 9, 2014, and local researcher Jenny Fawcett who uncovered the story of the “real Granny”.) [/learn_more]

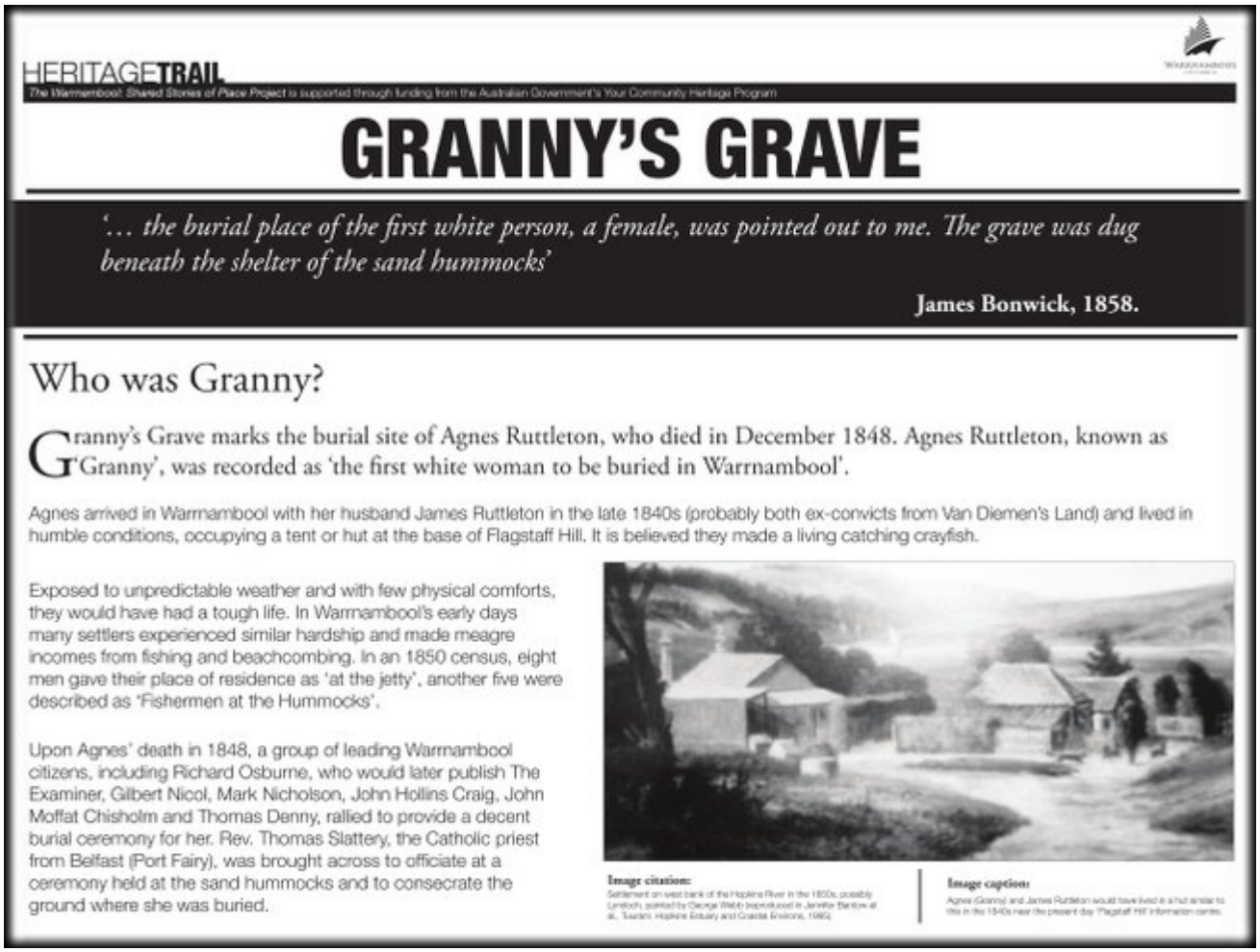
[dropcap style=”font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;”] T [/dropcap]he marine ply was found at Levy’s Beach where she occasionally walks with her father, who visits the area regularly in search of that other Warrnambool legend: the Mahogany Ship.

It is the first time Louise has entered her work in an exhibition, but unfortunately, after our interview, she learned that she had missed out in the selection process (the prize attracted more than 70 entries, of which only 50 could be selected).

Despite missing out, Louise remained upbeat, saying she had thoroughly enjoyed creating the work. We think Agnes would be pretty chuffed too.

In the meantime, the council plaque – which has been added to the viewing platform next to the grave – provides details about Agnes and her challenging life as one of the first non-Indigenous people to settle in the area.

A council spokesman said the full text of the plaque, which can be found at the end of this story, was developed with the assistance of **Elizabeth** and (the late) **Les O’Callaghan** and the Warrnambool Historical Society, in conjunction with historian **Dr Helen Doyle**.



The plaque created by the Warrnambool City Council that has been added to the viewing platform at Granny's Grave at Lady Bay. Image: Warrnambool City Council.

[learn_more caption="Read the full text on the grave plaque here:"] Who was Granny? Granny's Grave marks the burial site of Agnes Ruttleton, who died in December 1848. Agnes Ruttleton, known as "Granny", was recorded as "the first white woman to be buried in Warrnambool".

Agnes arrived in Warrnambool with her husband James Ruttleton in the late 1840s (probably both ex-convicts from Van Diemen's Land) and lived in humble conditions, occupying a tent or hut at the base of Flagstaff Hill. It is believed they made a living catching crayfish. Exposed to unpredictable weather and with few physical comforts, they would have had a tough life.

In Warrnambool's early days many settlers experienced similar hardship and made meagre incomes from fishing and beachcombing. In an 1850 census, eight men gave their place of residence as 'at the jetty', another five were described as 'Fishermen at the Hummocks'.

Upon Agnes' death in 1848, a group of leading Warrnambool citizens, including Richard Osburne, who would later publish The Examiner, Gilbert Nicol, Mark Nicholson, John Hollins Craig, John Moffat Chisholm and Thomas Denny, rallied to provide a decent burial ceremony for her.

Rev. Thomas Slattery, the Catholic priest from Belfast (Port Fairy), was brought across to officiate at a ceremony held at the sand hummocks and to consecrate the ground where she was buried.

[/learn_more]

[box]**The South West International Women's Day Art Prize will be launched Thursday March 5 at 6pm at The Artery, 224 Timor St, Warrnambool. Live music. Judging by internationally recognised Portland artist Carmel Wallace.**[/box]

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