

<b>Name</b>	Ninnes Lone Grave and Reserve	<b>Reference in 1998 Marong Study</b>	MG4
<b>Address</b>	Allotment 36, Parish of Marong, Maiden Gully, access by Pioneer Drive and Kawana Drive	<b>Map reference</b>	VicRoads 606 H5
<b>Building type</b>	Grave	<b>Survey date</b>	July 2010
<b>Date of construction</b>	Grave (1852); stone wall (1853)	<b>Recommendation</b>	Include in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay
<b>Significance</b>	Ninnes Lone Grave and Reserve is of at least local historical significance and is recommended for inclusion in the Heritage Overlay. It is also recommended for nomination to the Victorian Heritage Register.		



Left: Ninnes Lone Grave, looking south. Right: Ninnes Lone Grave, looking north.



Left: Headstone to west internal wall face. Right: Interpretation board.



Left: Aerial view, 2010 (Source: City of Greater Bendigo). Right: Proposed Heritage Overlay map, with the subject site designated as MG4.

**Intactness**      ✓ Good      Fair      Poor

## History

Thomas and Maria Ninnes and their children arrived in Australia at Point Henry, Geelong, on 8 November 1848 aboard the *Andromache* from Cornwall, moving from there to South Australia. In February 1852, Thomas, Maria and their three daughters, Mary, Martha and Grace, left the copper mines in Burra, South Australia and headed for the Bendigo goldfields. They travelled overland by wagon and eventually arrived at Myers' Creek (now Maiden Gully). The couple's daughter, Jane Ninnes, was born en route in March 1852. At Myer's Creek, Maria and her two young daughters, Grace and Jane, became ill. Both Grace (aged two) and Jane (aged two months) died on 29 May 1852. Maria died shortly afterwards in July 1852. Thomas buried Maria with the two children and built a cairn to mark the spot. He inscribed a nearby tree with their names and the date 7 July 1852. According to Thomas' notebook of July 7 1852:

*We took sum boards from the Burra with us which turned to make coffins. I made a nice coffin for the two children. My wife requested me to make a coffin for her also. It was a severe trial to me but I managed to make it Bound it with white cloth It appeared very nice John Thomas and sons dug the graves Nicholas Trahair read the burial service. So ends the history of a good clean carefull affectionate wife Myself with Mary + Martha was left to mourn our loss.*

In November 1853, Thomas returned to the grave site and noted that he:

*built a stone wall round the graves of my wife + and two children and cut the names in a large tree at the head of there graves The wall is alright but the tree is cut down ...*

Thomas Ninnes left Myer's Creek and returned to South Australia with his two surviving daughters in December 1853. Purchasing a farm at Clare in South Australia, he remarried and had several more children. Thomas died in 1894, requesting in his will that the grave be found, repaired and maintained. In 1905, Thomas and Maria's surviving daughters, Mary and Martha, returned to Maiden Gully to arrange a more permanent stone wall and headstone, and during the 1920s and 1930s an unknown stone mason reset and mortared the sandstone. Over the years, local residents have maintained the site. Family members also reputedly hold an annual pilgrimage to the grave.

Peter Rohs was the first owner of Allotment 36, from 1869-1910; the grave was located within this larger allotment. An immigrant from Denmark, he operated a bone and flock mill on the property. Subsequent owners include E W Hands, Mr & Mrs Wearnes, Desmond Checucci (owner from 1954-1966), Joseph Brains (owner from 1966-?), and more recently developers Return Nominees Pty Ltd, Queensland. The City of Greater Bendigo are now the owners of the site on which the graves are located, which is a Council reserve. A cement capping to the wall, mortar repairs, and an engraved memorial stone, are the most recent (probably 1990s) additions to the grave.<sup>1</sup>

## Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes

Victoria's themes and sub-themes:

- 4.5: Gold mining
- 8.5: Preserving traditions and commemorating

## Description & Integrity

The Ninnes Lone Grave and Reserve is located on a sloping allotment in Maiden Gully between Pioneer Drive to the south and Kawana Drive to the north. A pedestrian pathway provides access from both ends. The reserve is surrounded by modern housing development. The grave itself is surrounded by a stone wall, measuring approximately 3m x 2.5m and rising to 0.9m at its highest point. A number of different mortars are evident, reflecting upgrade works carried out over time. These include at least two different cement based mortars and a mud-based mortar. The remnants of cambered cement capping are evident to the tops of the walls. The base of the grave interior is natural earth. A headstone is fixed to the western interior (see page 1). The grave is in sound condition. It has been noted that some repairs have been unsympathetic (notably mortars) to the origins of the grave, and that the headstone requires regilding.<sup>2</sup> The grave reserve includes a number of naturally occurring native trees, including Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*). Timber post and rail fencing lines the

reserve boundaries. An interpretation sign, installed in 2002, is located to the east of the grave, next to the path.

### **Comparative Analysis**

Multiple examples of lone graves (also known as pioneer graves) exist across Victoria. They are generally associated with episodes in the early exploration and settlement of the State, such as the gold-induced settlement of Myers Flat (Maiden Gully) in the early 1850s. Many also pre-date the 1853 introduction of the civil registration of deaths in Victoria. The 2009 Conservation Management Plan for the Ninnes Lone Grave and Reserve, notes that 'the Ninnes Lone Grave is one of the very earliest known lone graves in Victoria ... [and] pre-dates the first recorded death in the Bendigo region (1 August 1852) ... The comprehensive information assembled by ... Mrs Edith Lunn, together with the intact original fabric of the grave, hard-won retention of a vestige of its once-rural setting, and the discovery of supporting documentary evidence through the memoirs of the grave's creator Thomas Ninnes makes this site one of the finest examples in the State today.'<sup>3</sup>

### **Assessment Against Criteria**

#### *Amended Heritage Victoria Criteria*

*Criterion A: Importance to the course, or pattern, of the City of Greater Bendigo's cultural history.*

The Ninnes Lone Grave is historically significant as one of the finest and best preserved examples of a lone grave (also known as pioneer graves) in Victoria; for its association with the earliest gold-rush related settlement and activity at Myers' Creek (now Maiden Gully); and for its capacity to demonstrate aspects of the often very harsh pioneering conditions experienced by the diggers, particularly those with families and young children. The Ninnes Lone Grave is also understood to be one of the very earliest known lone graves in Victoria, and pre-dates the first recorded European death in the Bendigo region. The Ninnes' migration from South Australia additionally demonstrates the often transient nature of life for people seeking work and income in Colonial Australia, including the movement (in this case) of Cornish miners from the copper mines of Burra to the Bendigo goldfields. While the grave and reserve are now surrounded by modern housing development, the retention of a small area of native vegetation helps preserve an aspect of the grave's original context.

*Criterion B: Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the City of Greater Bendigo's cultural history.*

N/A

*Criterion C: Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the City of Greater Bendigo's cultural history.*

The Ninnes Lone Grave provides graphic evidence of the realities of life as experienced by families on the early goldfields and helps document the tragic experience of the Ninnes family, losing two children on a single day followed by the mother, Maria Ninnes only weeks later.

*Criterion D: Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or objects.*

N/A

*Criterion E: Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics in the context of the municipality.*

N/A

*Criterion F: Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.*

N/A

*Criterion G: Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of the place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.*

N/A

*Criterion H: Special association with life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in the City of Greater Bendigo's history.*

N/A

## **Statement of Significance**

*What is significant?*

The Ninnes Lone Grave and Reserve is surrounded by modern housing development. The grave itself is enclosed by a stone wall, measuring approximately 3m x 2.5m and rising to 0.9m at its highest point. A number of different mortars are evident, reflecting upgrade works carried out over time. These include at least two different cement based mortars and a mud-based mortar. The remnants of cambered cement capping are evident to the tops of the walls. The grave reserve includes a number of naturally occurring native trees, including Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*). Timber post and rail fencing lines the reserve boundaries. An interpretation sign, installed in 2002, is located to the east of the grave, next to the path.

*How is it significant?*

Ninnes Lone Grave and Reserve is of local historical significance. The site may also be of significance in the State-wide context.

*Why is it significant?*

The Ninnes Lone Grave is of at least local significance (Criterion A) as one of the finest and best preserved examples of a lone grave (also known as pioneer graves) in Victoria; for its association with the earliest gold-rush related settlement and activity at Myers' Creek (now Maiden Gully); and for its capacity to demonstrate aspects of the often very harsh pioneering conditions experienced by the diggers, particularly those with families and young children. The Ninnes Lone Grave is also understood to be one of the very earliest known lone graves in Victoria, and pre-dates the first recorded European death in the Bendigo region. The Ninnes' migration from South Australia additionally demonstrates the often transient nature of life for people seeking work and income in Colonial Australia, including the movement (in this case) of Cornish miners from the copper mines of Burra to the Bendigo goldfields. While the grave and reserve are now surrounded by modern housing development, the retention of a small area of native vegetation helps preserve an aspect of the grave's original context. The Ninnes Lone Grave is also significant (Criterion C) for providing graphic evidence of the realities of life as experienced by families on the early goldfields, and helps document the tragic experience of the Ninnes family, losing two children on a single day followed by the mother, Maria Ninnes only weeks later.

## **Recommendations**

The Ninnes Lone Grave and Reserve is recommended for inclusion in the Schedule to the Greater Bendigo Heritage Overlay, to the extent of the reserve accessible from Pioneer Drive and Kawana Drive, and as shown on the above map. The focus of significance is on the grave and the natural setting of the reserve, which should be retained. The site is owned and managed by the City of Greater Bendigo, which commissioned a conservation management plan for the site in 2009 (Lee Andrews & Associates, see references). The CMP includes a suite of conservation and management policies, which are recommended to guide the future care and conservation of the site.

Given the potential State-level significance, consideration could be given to nominating the property to the Victorian Heritage Register.

External Paint Colours	No
Internal Alterations Controls	No
Tree Controls	No
Outbuildings and fences exemptions	No
Victorian Heritage Register	No
Prohibited uses may be permitted	No
Incorporated plan	No
Aboriginal heritage place	No

### Identified By

Andrew Ward, 1998.

### References

Lee Andrews & Associates, *Ninnes Lone Grave and Reserve Conservation Management Plan*, 2009.

Ken Arnold, *Bendigo its Environs, The Way it Was*, Volume 1, Crown Castleton Publishers, 2003.

Andrew Ward *et al*, City of Greater Bendigo Heritage Study (Marong) Study Area, Stage 2, 1998.

#### Specific:

<sup>1</sup> The history is derived from Lee Andrews & Associates, *Ninnes Lone Grave and Reserve Conservation Management Plan*, 2009; 'Lone Grave,' citation, Andrew Ward *et al*, City of Greater Bendigo Heritage Study (Marong) Study Area, Stage 2, 1998. Reference is also made to, Annette O'Donahue, *The Lone Grave*, paper submitted in part fulfilment of Diploma of Regional Studies, School of Education and Arts, Latrobe University, Bendigo, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Lee Andrews & Associates, *Ninnes Lone Grave and Reserve Conservation Management Plan*, 2009, pp. 29-30, referring to a 2009 inspection by heritage archaeologist David Bannear.

<sup>3</sup> Lee Andrews & Associates, *Ninnes Lone Grave and Reserve Conservation Management Plan*, 2009, p. 55.