

A local legacy to live on again

By Emma Brown

GREY mist fell across the Old Ballarat Cemetery yesterday as the restored grave of Ballarat's first philanthropist, Thomas Stoddart, was unveiled.

Emulating the Scottish countryside Stoddart was originally from, the wet, cold conditions didn't dampen the enthusiasm of the assembled crowd.

The grave restoration was funded by the Ballarat Foundation and co-ordinated by members of the Friends of the Ballarat Botanical Gardens.

John Garner and Jenny Burrell were co-ordinators of the project.

Born in 1828 in the Scottish border town of Roxburgh, Stoddart came to Ballarat in 1853.

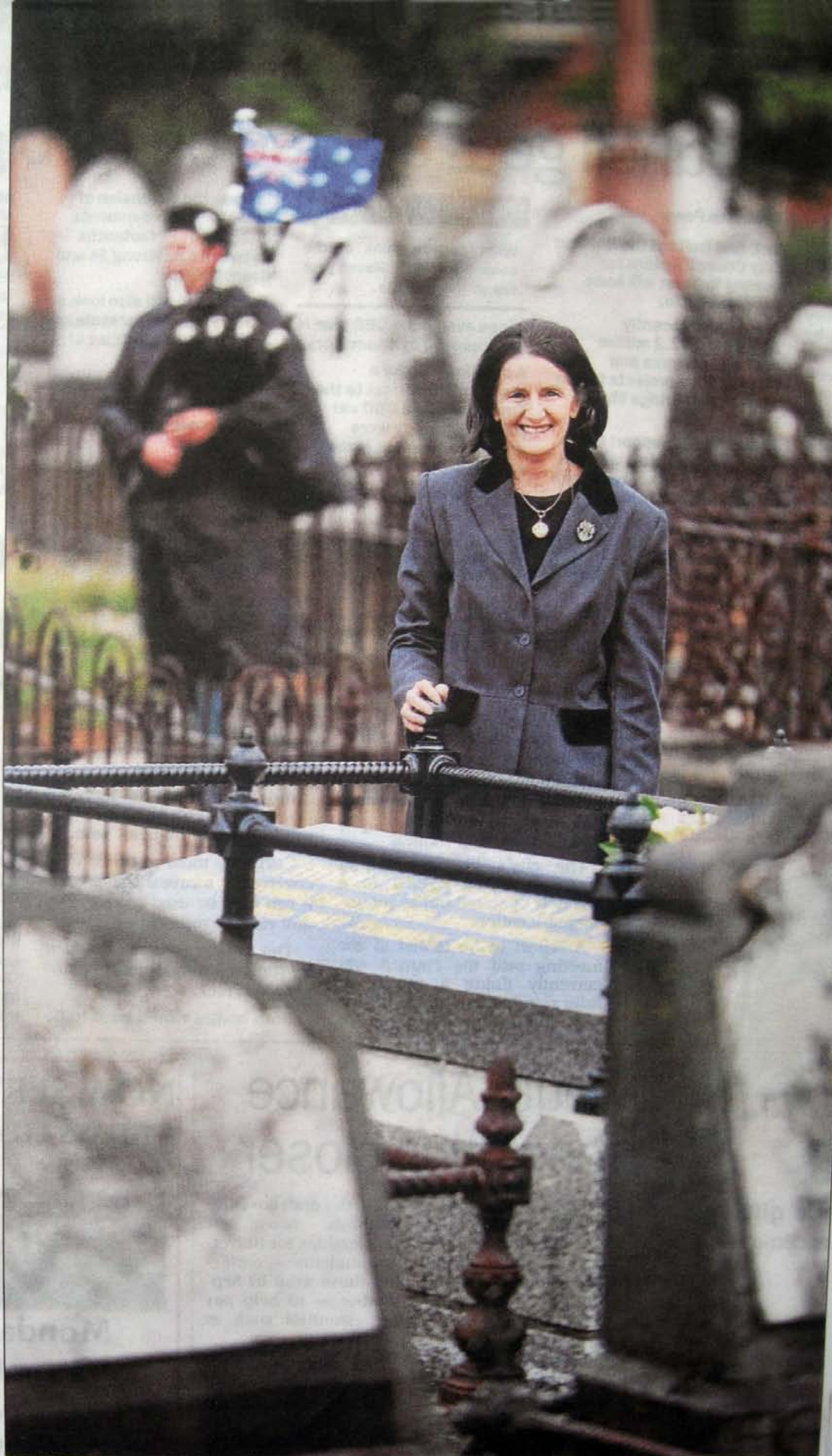
He financed and directed many gold mining companies to great success, making Ballarat a prosperous city — and Stoddart a wealthy man.

"In 1884, when he was in his mid-50s, Thomas Stoddart presented a dozen Italian white marble statues to adorn the public gardens," Ms Burrell said.

"The significance of the gift is that it inspired a movement to make Ballarat a 'City of Statues' and other philanthropists to give back to the town.

"That wonderful collection is now 126 years old, still intact, and very much valued.

"This grave is a public monument to the memory of one of the finest men in Ballarat's history and the FBBG felt strongly that it should be restored and kept in good repair," Ms Burrell said.



UNVEILED: Project co-ordinator Jenny Burrell beside the restored grave of Thomas Stoddart as Major Bradley Saul from the University of Ballarat Pipe Band plays in the background. Picture: **Jeremy Bannister**

The grave has had a handmade plaque added to it, telling of Stoddart's legacy to the city.

The granite has also been cleaned and the lettering regilded.

"With the grave restored and plans to run

educational history tours, the FBBG hopes a broader understanding and appreciation of Thomas Stoddart and

an insight into his vision and commitment is able to be passed on to future generations," Ms Burrell said.