

JAGGA-JAGGA -THE BLACK PIMPERNEL

Major Newman, the first settler in the area was not the only local settler antagonistic to Aboriginal people. Not far behind him was James Anderson, a dour Scotsman, who settled on Beal Yallock in 1839 and of course changed its name to Anderson's Creek. Anderson was just as disagreeable as the Major in his attitude to the local Kulin, but they were nonetheless both equal opportunity grouches. They were equally disagreeable with each other and their neighbours, as well as Aboriginal people.

1839 was a pivotal year for Aboriginal people in the Port Phillip district. On William Buckley's advice they had not fought the inevitable tide of people and animals that began in 1835, but the reality was far worse than they could possibly have imagined. The new hard-hoofed animals were eating everything, compacting the soil, and displacing their traditional game. The Kulin were now sharing the land with the white man, but if they went to share a sheep, they would be accused of stealing and shot at. To give you some idea of the magnitude of the influx of people and animals, by September 1838 the number of settlers was 3,511, the number of cattle 13,272 and sheep an unbelievable 310,946.

The situation enraged Jagga-Jagga, one of the three Wurundjeri Elders who met with Batman at Greensborough in 1835. In tribal times Jagga-Jagga was the Kidney-fat Man or executioner of criminals. You only got this job if you were the best hunter, tracker and fighter in the tribe.

About forty years old in 1839 he was a physically imposing figure, powerfully built and about 188 cm (6'2"). Jagga-Jagga wanted to declare war on the white invaders, so the Headman Billibelleri called a meeting of Elders at Bolin-Bolin in Bulleen late in 1839. After deep discussion they resolved to keep Murrangurk's law, which I told you about in the June edition, but Jagga-Jagga was given permission to escalate the economic war against any settlers doing the wrong thing.

Jagga-Jagga recruited about 30 young Kulin from the camp on the Merri Creek at Fairfield. Most of the men only had spears and clubs, but seven had muskets. Jagga-Jagga's band then began a series of attacks on settlers properties up the Plenty and Yarra Valleys. This was the beginning of the legend of Jagga-Jagga and he was seen by settlers as something of a Black Pimpernel. With his imposing height, powerful build, rugged features and forbidding persona, he was described as: *'Tall, very ugly and most elusive... a noted character dreaded by all men.'*

It was on 1st January 1840 that Jagga-Jagga and his men arrived at the junction of Anderson's Creek and the Yarra. They had most probably already burnt Major Newman's paddocks and driven off his stock. Where the Taroon Avenue Reserve now stands, James Anderson had planted a crop of potatoes. Jagga-Jagga and his men therefore set up camp, dug up the 'Whitefellow yams' and roasted them for dinner.

The next day, after being alerted by his workers, James Anderson approached Jagga-Jagga's camp, flanked by armed men. He shouted angrily at the Kulin to clear off and stop stealing his potatoes, but was stopped short when a shot sounded as a musket ball whistled past his ear. Anderson immediately retreated to change his underclothing and despatched a worker to ride into Melbourne to demand that the Border Police take action.

Accompanied by three troopers, Captain Henry Gisborne rode up the Yarra Valley and ascertained that the Aboriginal band was headed toward the Ryrie brothers' Yering Station at Yarra Glen. Arriving there on January 13th Gisborne and his men disguised themselves as farm workers. One of the Ryrie brothers approached Jagga-Jagga when he arrived, saying he would kill a bullock in his honour. However when Jagga-Jagga and one of his men approached, the three troopers pounced on him whilst Gisborne held a pistol to the other man's head. It took the three troopers ten minutes before they could handcuff Jagga-Jagga and imprison him in a shed.

A lot of shots were then exchanged in the 'Battle of Yering' before Jagga-Jagga finally escaped. Gisborne later noted in his formal report that: *'...balls came whizzing past us every minute; but I am unable to account for their never having hit us as they are capital marksmen'*.

What Gisborne of course didn't know was that Jagga-Jagga and his men were still bound by Murrangurk's Law to never kill a white man. And how right they were to obey it, because any white death would have been followed by punitive expeditions, in which many innocent Kulin lives would have been forfeited.

After this encounter at Yarra Glen, Jagga-Jagga melted into the ether. Reports began to filter in from all over the colony. Jagga-Jagga was held responsible for every depredation on settlers and he became something of a cross between a Bushranger and a Freedom Fighter,

From the more reliable reports, his band of about thirty men seems to have broken up over the next six months. The first of these reports was a fortnight after the Battle of Yering. A settler on the Campaspe River, Henry Monroe, reported that one of his shepherds had been stripped naked and threatened with being killed and eaten. 1,500 of Monroe's sheep were then driven off. The fact that the shepherd was terrorised rather than killed and his flock driven off, certainly rings true that it was Jagga-Jagga.

Two months later in March 1840, Peter Snodgrass who had a run on the Yea River, reported that Jagga-Jagga had threatened to kill one of his shepherds, Sam Dayton. Dayton had committed various outrages against the local Kulin, so Jagga-Jagga and four others finally trapped Dayton and other shepherds in a hut. The group now included a charismatic young Taungerong leader, twenty year old Winberrie.

Jagga-Jagga thrust a gun in Dayton's chest causing him to fall on his back. He then raged at the terrified Dayton that he was about to die and Dayton begged Winberrie to save him. Winberrie said Dayton was 'no good' but then persuaded the others to spare his life. There is little doubt that the whole event was stage managed to strike mortal fear into the shepherds and prevent any further crimes by them, whilst still enabling the Kulin to keep Murangurk's Law.

In company with Winberrie and four others, Jagga-Jagga continued to terrorise recalcitrant settlers in the Yea River area for the next two months. However by May 1840 he was reported as being back in the Yarra Valley, burning the paddocks of settlers like Major Newman. There is a police report of another armed confrontation at Yering in May 1840, in which three troopers were wounded, but Jagga-Jagga's presence was only rumoured.

Similarly a Fifty Pound reward was posted for the capture of Jagga-Jagga for the murder of a hut keeper on the Ovens River in July 1840. However apart from the fact that the murder was against Murrangurk's Law, it occurred out of Kulin Country and its timing perhaps conflicted with a verified event in Bulleen.

Here, a Scottish shepherd employed by John Kerr had the habit of hanging his lunch bag in a tree whilst he sat under it and serenaded the sheep with his bagpipes. On one such day Jagga-Jagga and a companion, probably Winberrie, suddenly appeared on either side of the Scotsman. They were armed with rifles and spears and squatted down beside him. The terrified shepherd immediately knew it was Jagga-Jagga. There was no mistaking his powerful build and rugged features.

Jagga-Jagga signalled to the tucker bag in the tree, said that they were both hungry and would appreciate something to eat. The shepherd of course fetched his lunch bag. As the two Kulin began to eat, the shepherd was told to continue playing. So whilst he nervously skirled the bagpipes to the unconcerned sheep, Jagga-Jagga and his mate enjoyed a nice lunch. They then thanked him for the meal and the musical entertainment and wandered off leaving the shepherd to recount what he thought was a near death experience. The story also gives another glimpse of Jagga-Jagga's rather devilish sense of humour.

With all these stories of Jagga-Jagga's depredations a detachment of soldiers under the command of Major Samuel Lettsom was sent from Sydney to capture him. Not finding him in the Goulburn Valley, the troop arrived in Melbourne in October 1840. Lettsom was advised that Jagga-Jagga had been seen at the Fairfield Aboriginal camp at the Merri Creek. Accordingly, 58 troopers and police descended on the camp and bailed up 400 Kulin at gunpoint.

Winberrie, who was among them and carrying a waddy, stepped forward. He extended his arms and asked Lettsom what he was intending to do, only to be shot dead by a trooper.

The 'Lettsom Raid' failed to capture Jagga-Jagga and the murder of Winberrie received official justification. There were many sightings of Jagga-Jagga after this and many depredations blamed on him, none of which really seemed to bear his trademarks. Nobody has any idea when and where Jagga-Jagga finally died or under what circumstances.