

## THE FLEETING FAME OF JAMES ANDERSON

James Anderson was the first settler in the Warrandyte area, but not much is known about him, either before or after his five years in the district. A Scotsman, Anderson, and his wife plus a few hired hands, had in early 1839 driven a herd of cattle, sheep and goats from Sydney to Port Phillip, looking for grazing land to claim.

Finding the area north of Melbourne closely settled, Anderson headed east and crossed the Yarra at Heidelberg. He then kept going along the south side of the Yarra until he found 'vacant' land at a creek known as Beal Yallock. This, he renamed as Anderson's Creek, by which it has been known ever since.

The creek valley he claimed included the place where an Aboriginal encampment would have been located above the annual flood line, about where the Goldfields Shopping Centre now stands. Later settlers found Aboriginal middens (piles of discarded mussel shells) along the river front, but it is not known where exactly the Aboriginal encampment was, or what had happened to it. However, local oral history suggests that Anderson shared with his neighbour on Mullum-Mullum Creek, Major Newman, an antagonistic attitude toward the natives. This is to some extent shown in the one historic event for which James Anderson is remembered - his confrontation on New Year's Day 1840, with the famed and feared Aboriginal leader, Jagga-Jagga.

With the permission of Elders, Jagga-Jagga had in late 1839 recruited about thirty young men in order to harass settlers, along the Yarra Valley, who were known to be committing crimes against Aboriginal people. This included breaking down the settlers' fences, burning their paddocks and driving off their stock. Jagga-Jagga and his men were however bound by Aboriginal law to not kill any white man, as this would only provoke terrible and indiscriminate revenge.

Jagga-Jagga achieved fame and notoriety amongst the settlers very quickly. Not only was he audacious and fearless, he was also tall, powerfully built, had rugged features, a long scar across his cheek, and a mole on the side of his nose. He was therefore instantly recognisable and typically described as being: *'...tall, very ugly and most elusive....a noted character dreaded by all men'*.

Jagga-Jagga and his men may well have just come from burning Major Newman's paddocks when they arrived at the junction of Anderson's Creek and the Yarra, where the Taroona Avenue Reserve now is. Upon seeing the crop of potatoes which had been planted by Anderson, they proceeded to dig them up and began roasting them.

Alerted to their presence, Anderson stormed down, flanked by two armed workers. He ordered them off, saying he would have them all arrested and thrown in jail. However, six of Jagga-Jagga's men also had muskets, and the incident was recounted by Anderson in a subsequent letter to the Police Magistrate.

*'Upon my saying this...several of them stood up and seized their muskets...two or three were standing together and among them Jackie-Jackie...One shot was fired from themselves but I cannot tell which fired it as my eyes were turned away at the time. I heard the ball whiz past me into the scrub.'*

Faced with thirty recalcitrant natives armed with muskets as well as spears, Anderson of course made the wise decision to immediately go back to his hut and change his underwear. He then wrote a letter of complaint to the Border Police. Strangely, the troopers in Melbourne twiddled their thumbs for several days before appearing at Anderson's Creek to investigate. By this time, Jagga-Jagga and his men had well and truly gone, heading further up the Yarra toward Yarra Glen.

Ultimately there was a shootout there with the troopers. It was the only colonial era conflict with Aboriginals in Victoria, in which both sides had guns, and is now forever known as 'The Battle of Yering'. So, James Anderson's fleeting moment of fame rests on his part in the genesis of this conflict. Four years later, Anderson sold up to Major Newman and seemingly vanished.

A few years ago, I happened to mention this to fellow local historian, Mick Woiwod. He said he had found out that the reason for this, was that Anderson had spent the next twenty years in jail. Apparently, Anderson was present when a riot erupted in which a policeman was then attacked. Anderson yelled out 'Kill the bastard' which they then did. Anderson was duly arraigned along with the culprits, found guilty of 'Incitement to Murder' and sentenced to twenty years in jail.

I have not been able to verify this and Mick has since died, but it nonetheless provides a rational explanation for the sudden disappearance of James Anderson. It is perhaps somewhat ironic that James Anderson's name is so remembered, just because he was the first settler in Warrandyte and had a confrontation with Jagga-Jagga.

However, despite his brief time in the district and possible convict fate, James Anderson's place in local history is well preserved. After all, he has a local creek, a road, two streets and a primary school named after him.