

JAGGA-JAGGA (C1800-C1842) THE LAST KIDNEY-FAT MAN

Jagga-Jagga is an almost mythical figure from early colonial times in Victoria. This is attributable in part to his tribal role as Kidney-Fat Man (Marmbulakul) or tribal executioner. Qualification for this role is simple in that you have to be the best hunter, tracker and fighter in the tribe. Plus, you need to have the stomach to surgically remove the kidneys of the criminals you track down, whether you have killed them first or not. Together with Bebejern and Billibelleri, Jagga-Jagga was one of three Wurundjeri leaders who met with Batman on the Plenty River in 1835. Like them, Jagga-Jagga had most probably been invited to assume his role as Marmbulakul after the devastation of the second smallpox plague in 1828

There is very little background information available on Jagga-Jagga. His family relationships are not known, apart from the fact that his two sons Keelbundoora and Jika-Jika were present at the meeting with Batman in 1835. As a mark of respect to him, two Parishes were later named nearby after his two sons. This was further proof of the meeting location being the Plenty River. Jagga-Jagga is thought to have been born about 1800 and died perhaps around 1842, even though sightings of him were claimed into the mid-1840's. His home Country is thought to have been the Plenty and Diamond Valleys. He certainly spent a great deal of his time in that area terrorising settlers in the early 1840's, and the federal electorate in this area is named after him.

One of the three Wurundjeri leaders to meet with Batman in 1835, Jagga-Jagga was by 1839 furious at the effects of the British invasion. He called on the Headman, Billibelleri, to convene a meeting of Elders in order to repeal Murrangurk's law. Named after William Buckley this law forbade any Kulin from killing a white man and thereby provoke the indiscriminate massacres that Buckley had warned would result.

Billibelleri therefore called a meeting of Elders at the Merri Creek junction with the Yarra River late in 1839. After deep discussion they resolved to keep Murrangurk's law, but Jagga-Jagga was given permission to escalate the economic war against any of the settlers doing the wrong thing by Kulin people. Despite many severe provocations, Jagga-Jagga continued to strictly obey Murrangurk's Law and the will of the Elders, and he never killed a white man.

Around December 1839 Jagga-Jagga recruited about 30 young Kulin men from the camp on the Merri Creek at Fairfield. Most of the men only had spears and clubs, but seven had muskets given to them by the Chief Aboriginal Protector, George Augustus Robinson for hunting purposes. Jagga-Jagga's band then began a series of attacks, burning the paddocks of settlers along 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.'*

On 1st January 1840 Jagga-Jagga and his men arrived at the junction of Anderson's Creek and the Yarra where the local settler, James Anderson, had planted a patch of potatoes. Jagga-Jagga and his men set up camp, dug up the 'Whitefella 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 men 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 and dispatched a worker to ride into Melbourne, demanding that the Border Police take action against the native brigands.

Accompanied by three heavily armed troopers, Captain Henry Gisborne rode up the Yarra Valley and ascertained that the band seemed to be heading toward Yering Station, the property of the Ryrie brothers at Yarra Glen. Arriving at Yarra Glen on January 13th 1840 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 farmhouse, the three troopers pounced on him whilst Gisborne held a pistol to the head of Jagga-Jagga's companion. It took the three troopers ten minutes before they could handcuff Jagga-Jagga and imprison him in an iron shed.

A lot of shots were then exchanged in the 'Battle of Yering' before Jagga-Jagga's men finally engineered his escape from the shed. 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 inexorably followed by a punitive expedition, in which many innocent Kulin lives would have been forfeited.

After that many reports began circulating about the 'crimes' of Jagga-Jagga and his men. However the more reliable reports seem to indicate that the band of about thirty men gradually broke up over the next six months. The first of these more credible 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 (obviously for theatrical effect) with being killed and eaten. Following this, 1,500 of Monroe's sheep had been driven off.

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, who had committed outrages against local Kulin women. Jagga-Jagga and a group of four others finally trapped Dayton and other shepherds in a hut. Among Jagga-Jagga's group was a new member, a charismatic young Taungerong leader, twenty year old Winberrie.

Jagga-Jagga thrust a gun in Dayton's chest causing the man to fall on his back. He then raged over the terrified Dayton that he was about to die. Dayton begged Winberrie to save him and Winberrie said that Dayton was '*no good*', but then persuaded Jagga-Jagga to spare his life. There is little doubt that the whole event was stage managed to strike mortal fear into the shepherds and deter any further crimes by them, whilst at the same time still enabling the Kulin to keep Murrangurk'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 in May 1840 he was reported as being back in the Yarra Valley, burning the paddocks of settlers. This was confirmed by a report in mid-1840 when a Scottish shepherd told of a most graphic encounter with Jagga-Jagga near Bolin-Bolin Billabong in Bulleen.

The Scottish shepherd had the habit of hanging his lunch bag in a tree whilst he sat under the tree and serenaded the grazing sheep with his bagpipes. On one such day Jagga-Jagga and a companion, probably Winberrie, suddenly appeared on either side of the Scotsman as he sat skirling his pipes under a tree. The two men were armed with rifles and spears and squatted down beside the terrified shepherd. He immediately knew it was Jagga-Jagga because there was no mistaking the description that had been circulating amongst the settlers about his powerful build and 'rugged' features.

Jagga-Jagga signalled to the tucker bag in the tree, said that he and his friend were both hungry and would appreciate something to eat. The shepherd of course fetched his lunch bag and timidly handed it over. As the two men began to eat, Jagga-Jagga told the shepherd to continue playing. So whilst he nervously played the bagpipes to the unconcerned sheep, Jagga-Jagga and his mate enjoyed a nice lunch. On finishing, they thanked the shepherd 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 hostile actions against the settlers Governor Gipps in Sydney ordered a detachment of soldiers to go and apprehend him. Under the command of Major Samuel Lettsom the troop rode from Sydney to Goulburn Valley, but by then Jagga-Jagga had reportedly left the area. The troop finally arrived in Melbourne in October 1840 and Lettsom was advised that Jagga-Jagga had been seen at the Fairfield Aboriginal camp at the Merri Creek and Yarra junction. In a well executed military manoeuvre 58 troopers and police descended on the camp and bailed up the 400 Kulin there at gunpoint.

Winberrie was among the crowd, so it seems that Lettsom's intelligence may have been accurate when he received it. Winberrie was carrying a waddy and as he stepped forward, he extended his arms. He enquired of 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 was immediately given official justification. There were many sightings of Jagga-Jagga after this and many depredations blamed on him, but most of these did not seem to bear his trademarks. Nobody really has any idea when and where Jagga-Jagga died or under what circumstances, but he was the last Kidney-Fat Man of the Kulin, and to this day remains a larger-than-life legend.