

READINGS IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

-The History you were never taught

THEME 7: THE IMPACTS OF COLONISATION

This section explores the impacts of colonisation in the Port Phillip area over the twenty years from first contact in 1835. This exploration is from both the Aboriginal and settler perspectives, with Jim drawing heavily on his own family's oral history.

Themes of both conflict and accommodation are recounted and show how a true Australian identity began to emerge from this period.

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THEME 7 QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Is the toenail of Saint Thomas a Totem?
2. Jagga-Jagga has a federal electorate named after him and two local Parishes, Jika-Jika and Bundoora are named after his sons, but did you know his story?
3. Were most settlers hostile, benign or indifferent to Aboriginal people?
4. What is the origin of the saying to 'Keep your ear to the ground'?

HOW BUNJIL GOT PROMOTED TO GOD

Bunjil the Eagle is often cited by Woiwurrung people as their equivalent of God, but that does not make much sense to me from a traditional Aboriginal cultural perspective.

It can be a bit dangerous for a non-Aboriginal person to question such things, but the reality is that Aboriginal people have been subject to many generations of indoctrination into 'white' thinking. Also, Aboriginal people have suffered such cultural loss that understandably they want to cling closely to any information or cultural practice handed down.

The problem is that the idea of Terra Nullius did not just proclaim Australia as a continent '*owned by no-one*'. It painted Aboriginal people as a simple, primitive, backward bunch of stone-age wanders. Historians and anthropologists have drawn their conclusions based on western cultural assumptions and many of these assumptions have leached insidiously into present day Aboriginal thinking. The term 'Cultural Expropriation' could perhaps be coined.

Conclusions that seem eminently logical to European minds are not questioned. People fail to ask: *Well how did Aboriginal think when they were confronted with that problem? How did they make sense of it from their perspective?*

For instance, Aboriginal stories are often presented as simple animal fantasies. Totem meanings of the animals are rarely explained. For instance Eagle is the totem for power, Crow means wisdom, Owl means death, Turtle means age or Blue Wren signifies a little girl and so on.

Totems also represent sophisticated ecological concepts. For instance Aboriginal philosophy splits the world as into complementary opposites, much like the Taoist ideas of Yin and Yang. The world is seen to compose of dualities like night and day, male and female, hot and cold, up and down, thunder and lightning, wind and rain and so on. Everything is held in balance within these two halves of reality.

In eastern Australia these halves (moiety) were represented by the totems of Bunjil the Eagle and Wagara the Crow. To designate one of these moiety totems as the Supreme Being upsets this idea of universal balance.

As indicated, Bunjil is also the totem for power and Wagara the totem for wisdom, so this directly implies that power and wisdom must be kept in balance. Power must be exercised with wisdom and wisdom has to be recognised as a source of power. Also, within the original Woiwurrung skin-group marriage system, both Eagle and Crow represented the father-child relationship.

When Victorian colonisation began in 1835, the Woiwurrung were confronted with evangelistic Christians such as the Aboriginal Protector, William Thomas. One of the earliest sermons by Thomas in 1839 was '*The All-Seeing Eye of God*'.

In it he painted the Christian God as almighty, all-powerful, all-seeing and vengeful, as well as having a special father-son relationship. Thomas recorded God's name in Woiwurrung as *Marmanella*, but this is more a form of address meaning '*Our Father*'. So it seems likely that Woiwurrung people were just reflecting the words Thomas commonly used in prayer.

Like in the Jewish faith where the name of God 'Yahweh' tended to be secret and not openly spoken, so the name of the Supreme Being in many Aboriginal tribes tended not to be spoken. In many south-east Australian tribes this secret name was Baiamee, with Bunjil being a major Creator Spirit responsible for creating the wind and the sky, in other words the heavens.

However in 1888 William Barak disclosed that Booriel was the Woiwurrung name for the Supreme Being. Barak said that Booriel was an infinite being who was discussed as little as possible, because you could look foolish in discussing something beyond comprehension.

On hearing sermons about the Christian God, the first question likely to arise in the mind of an Aboriginal person was therefore: *What is this God fellah's totem?*

Logical reflection would be along the lines: *Well, both Eagle and Crow represent the father-child relationship, but Crow represents all-knowing wisdom, while Bunjil represents almighty power. Bunjil also has all-seeing eyes, and was the Creator of the Heavens, where this God-fellah is supposed to live, so his totem must be Bunjil.*

Apart from being a Creator Spirit, Bunjil was also an Ancestor Hero of human form. So the stories of how Bunjil once walked on Earth now became a parallel for Christ's time on Earth. This therefore reinforced the primary totemic connection of God with Bunjil. Also, as Christ now became the medium for Christian ascent to Heaven, the parallel with Bunjil as Creator of the Heavens was complete.

With the effluxion of time and the continual erosion of cultural knowledge through the Mission Station era, I therefore believe Bunjil ended up being promoted by Woiwurrung people in the neo-colonial period from a Creator-Spirit and Ancestor-Hero, to the Supreme Being. Regardless of this promotion however, Bunjil can nonetheless still be legitimately regarded as God's Totem to contemporary Woiwurrung people.

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.

Billibelleri (c1791-1846) An Astute Leader in Testing Times

Born about 1791, Billibelleri's Home Country was the Moonee Ponds Creek, Merri Creek and Darebin Creek valleys. As a child Billibelleri demonstrated the prodigious memory required to continually learn songs, stories, and ceremonies and so ultimately progress to high status.

This was evident by him becoming Wurundjeri Songman around 1828 after the smallpox plague of 1828. Like the first smallpox plague of 1789 the second plague of 1828 wiped out a whole generation of Elders.

Songman was the second most senior tribal position, and required all tribal council decisions to be coded into songs and ceremonies for transmission and dissemination.

Following the death in 1836 of Woiwurung Headman Bebejern, Billibelleri was invited to fill the role. With British colonisation having begun the year before in 1835, Billibelleri was faced with crisis and change at every level. Having been warned for many years by the escaped convict William Buckley that any resistance would result in wholesale slaughter, Billibelleri decided he had to try and help his people adapt to the new world as best they could.

Over the course of the next ten years as Headman, Billibelleri proved himself to be an adroit diplomat, negotiator and strategist, albeit from a very inferior power base. With the arrival of the well-meaning but sanctimonious and relatively powerless Aboriginal Protector William Thomas in early 1839, Billibelleri fostered a close relationship with him.

When Billibelleri's 18 year old son Wonga badly injured his foot on Mount Dandenong in September 1839 and was nursed back to health by William Thomas and his wife Suzannah, it proved to be a stroke of luck. Although Wonga was back in full health in a couple of months, Billibelleri instructed his son to stay with Thomas and learn all he could of 'whitefellow ways'. Wonga accordingly kept company with Thomas in his work for the next four years, and this ultimately shaped the survival of Wurundjeri people into the present day.

Billibelleri and Wonga were often exasperated by the constant sermonising of Thomas about his all-seeing, almighty and vengeful God, as well as his frequent attempts at social climbing with the squattocracy. However whenever an issue arose involving any lower status members of colonial society, Thomas proved to be a powerful ally and advocate for Aboriginal people.

By mid-1840 public concern was mounting over the presence of an Aboriginal camp on the outskirts of Melbourne where the Botanic Gardens are now sited. Thomas was consequently ordered by Governor LaTrobe to *'itinerate with the natives'* and find a site for a reserve away from Melbourne.

Billibelleri led the troop to his first choice, the Bolin-Bolin Billabong near Heidelberg. However this was rejected by Thomas as being *'too close to civilization'*. Billibelleri's second choice was Pound Bend at Warrandyte, but this was also rejected. Billibelleri then left the party in exasperation and told his son Wonga to take over the task.

Wonga then led the troop south from Bolin-Bolin down the Dandenong Creek valley. Wonga then chose a site at Nerre-Nerre Warren, north of Dandenong in September 1840. However no economic base was ever established at the Reserve apart from government handouts, and it was therefore doomed from the start.

In 1842 the Native Police Force was established and it was also located at the Nerre-Nerre Warren Reserve. Billibelleri gave his patronage to the force and was given honorary officer status and a uniform. He also persuaded Bebejern's son, Barak, to join the Native Police. However in late 1843 the Native Police troop was taken on a punitive expedition to Portland, where they were involved in the massacre of 17 Mara people. In response Billibelleri immediately withdrew his support for the Native Police.

By this time in December 1843 the Reserve at Nerre-Nerre Warren had already collapsed. William Thomas subsequently established his residence at the junction of the Merri Creek and Yarra River which was adjacent to an Aboriginal camp already there. In 1845 Thomas established a Baptist school at Merri Creek for the education of the children of the camp.

Billibelleri again threw his support behind the initiative, sending his own children there to learn how to read and write. His son Munnarin proved to be one of the brightest students and was being groomed to follow in the footsteps of his older brother, Wonga. However over the following year Billibelleri began to sicken as the cold he had caught entrenched itself as pneumonia. Billibelleri eventually died on 9th August 1846 at age 55 and was buried with Bebejern at the Merri Creek junction with the Yarra.

TWO STARKLY DIFFERENT TYPES OF COLONIST

Charles Newman was the first settler to arrive in the district in 1837 and he established a run along Mullum-Mullum Creek. Newman had joined the Indian Army in 1801 and achieved the rank of Major before coming to Tasmania in 1834 with his Indian wife and four children. He was the epitome of the British Raj. A harsh and cantankerous man, he was well known for his poor treatment of convict workers and anyone of a lower class.

Over the next year the Major travelled back and forth to Tasmania, ferrying livestock to his run and by 1838 he had taken up permanent residence here. However his wife and children did not join him until two years later.

In the meantime Newman's 17 year old step-daughter Maria had begun a relationship with a young blacksmith, Tom Cunningham. Being the son of a convict, Newman vehemently objected to the relationship, so Maria and Tom eloped to Melbourne in 1838. Newman then promptly disinherited her.

Newman's military training was obvious in the site and construction of the turf-block house he built. The river, creek and steep escarpment effectively blocked approach from north, east and south. The western wall had narrow slit windows, enabling the Major to shoot at any natives approaching from the west.

Aboriginal people quickly figured out it was no use ducking when you heard a gun go bang, because the bullet is faster than the sound. With their sharp eyesight they quickly saw that a puff of smoke from the barrel of the gun preceded the bullet. This gave rise to them playing a very dangerous game.

Murrangurk's Law prevented the Kulin from killing a white man, but they were still able to wage an economic war against settlers like the Major. So whilst one group occupied the Major busily shooting from his window, another group would break down his fences, set fire to his paddocks and drive off his stock.

The men in the first group would each stand next to a tree, attract the Major's attention and at the sight of a puff of smoke would jump back behind their tree. Before the Major had time to pick up and fire his next musket, they would jump back out into the open, swing around and bare their buttocks at him, then jump back behind cover.

By autumn 1840 the Major's wife and children had joined him and he decided to hire free settlers rather than convicts. So in September 1840 the Major was dockside when my great-great grandparents, John and Mary Anne Chivers, arrived from England. John was a strongly built ex-bareknuckle fighter, so the Major hired him as a tree-feller at 25 Pounds a year. He also hired Mary-Ann as a governess to home-school his children at 15 Pounds.

John and Mary Ann could scarcely believe their luck at finding jobs before they had even got off the ship. They packed their belongings in the Major's wagon and headed off to the Stringybark forest past Heidelberg. As they trundled along the Major began regaling them with stories about 'the damned Blacks' and their allegedly murderous ways. He said that John would need a gun for protection and pressed an old flintlock pistol, gunpowder and a bag of shot on him.

The Major dropped them off at a shepherds hut near present day Fitzsimon's Lane Bridge and John began the task of clearing the land. Every morning, Mary Anne would insist on John taking the pistol with him while he worked in the forest. One day soon after arriving, John was working and heard voices, but it was not English. He stopped work and peered around, seeing half a dozen spear-carrying natives slowly surrounding the clearing. John quickly loaded the pistol, but did not want to point it at anyone, so instead bent his knees and pointed it at the ground. By this time he was surrounded and he pulled the trigger, hoping the report would scare them away.

Instead the tribesmen fell around laughing fit to bust. One of the men patted John on the back and wiping away tears of laughter, explained that it looked and sounded like the greatest fart in human history. John threw the pistol away and invited them all back to his hut for a cup of tea, which they readily agreed to. Mary Ann must have nearly fainted when she saw her husband emerge from the forest with a band of spear-bearing natives, but it was the start of many generations of friendships for our family.

After their contracted year John and Mary Anne ceased working for the Major and he entered into a partnership making wagon wheels from River Redgums on Westerfolds. It would have enraged the Major to know that John's new business partner was young Tom Cunningham.

THE LEGENDARY JIMMY DAWSON (WD Jul 2019)

Like anywhere else, the early settlers in our local area had a mixture of attitudes toward Aboriginal people. The vast majority ranged from reasonably accepting to relatively indifferent, but there were only a few others at either end of the spectrum from harsh to embracing.

For instance Major Newman, James Anderson and John Hughes were settlers who would willingly shoot at Aboriginal people with murderous intent. At the other end of the scale there were local settlers like John Chivers, John Green and Jimmy Dawson who established lifelong Aboriginal friendships and an abiding interest in Aboriginal culture.

I have mentioned Jimmy Dawson a few times before in 'Birrarrung Stories' and I feel a particular affinity with him. Dawson was a very early settler at Warrandyte who has contributed more to my knowledge of Aboriginal culture than any other individual. Apart from this and sharing the same first name, we also share the same birthdate of the 5th of July, albeit 135 years apart.

Jimmy Dawson and his wife Joan, who was the niece of African explorer Mungo Park, arrived from Linlithgow in Scotland with and together with George Selby's family, settled near Anderson's Creek in May 1840. Jimmy had the foresight to bring a prefabricated house with him. He arrived only four months before my great-great grandfather John Chivers came to Templestowe in September 1840.

Jimmy and John were of a similar ages, Jimmy being born in 1806 and John in 1809. They were neighbours, contemporaries and like-minded people who obviously must have known each other. However there is no oral history as to how well. As far as I know they were the only two settlers in the district who learned to speak Woiwuring fluently, although it is likely that the Reverend John Green also had a reasonable command of the language.

Jimmy Dawson's only child Isabella was born at Warrandyte in 1843. Like my great-grandfather Tom Chivers, who was born a year later in 1844, Isabella maintained a lifelong interest in Aboriginal culture and language.

The Dawson family prospered in their time at Warrandyte, so in 1844 Jimmy purchased a cattle run at Port Fairy. On his arrival there Dawson quickly established strong Aboriginal friendships. This was made easier by him finding that the Woiwuring language he had learned at Warrandyte was very similar to the Hopkins River languages of Kirraewurrong and Tjapwoorong.

The federation of tribes in the Western District of Victoria commonly identify as 'Gunditjmara' which literally means '*members of the human race*' and they have a most fabulous history. They fought an eighteen year war against colonisation from when the Henty's first arrived in 1834. It ended in a final massacre of 200 people at Lake Condah in 1852, with the bodies thrown into the lake.

Against the odds the Gunditjmara survived and produced a whole series of champion cricketers, footballers, boxers and soldiers. I was so enamoured with their story that in 1984 I made a documentary film of their exploits called '*The Fighting Gunditjmara*'. Through the records left by Jimmy Dawson, particularly on how the tribal football game (Marngrook) was played, I was also able to decode tribal totemic structures.

In 1881 Jimmy Dawson produced a book '*Australian Aborigines*' from the notes he and his daughter had collected. Dawson did an unprecedented job in recording Gunditjmara languages and culture for the benefit of future generations. He was however no passive bystander. Throughout his 94 year life Jimmy was a fearless advocate for Aboriginal people, right until his death in 1900.

For instance, he gave evidence at the 1877 Royal Commission and severely criticised the assumptions on which native policy was based. He considered Aboriginal people were entitled to government support without obligation, to compensate for the loss of their lands. He reviled their treatment as a conquered people with no rights. He believed it was completely unfair to restrict their freedom of movement whilst pressing unpalatable employment and religion on them. It has taken another 150 years for the rest of us to catch up to Jimmy.

Also in the 1880's, Dawson collected money from the settlers around Camperdown, to erect a monument to a famous Elder who had died and been buried outside the cemetery. However when some settlers refused to contribute, Jimmy went to Melbourne with a list of names of the settlers who had been involved in the infamous '*Sunday Hunts*'. Many Aboriginal people had been murdered in these heinous events, but nobody had been brought to account.

Jimmy presented this list to the editor of the Argus, Frederick Haddon, and demanded he publish it. When Haddon refused, the 80 year old Jimmy Dawson laid waste to the Argus office with his walking cane. Right to the end Jimmy Dawson remained a true friend and fearless advocate for all Aboriginal people.

GROWING UP IN FRONTIER TIMES

My great-grandfather Tom Chivers was born in a bark hut in September 1844, by the Yarra River opposite its junction with Diamond Creek. By then Tom's older brother Willie was four and spoke Woiwuring as fluently as he spoke English.

Willie was soon giving little Tom piggy-backs on daily excursions with their Aboriginal playmates. This included a boy named Lanky who was a year and a half younger than Willie and three years old than Tom. Lanky was to remain a lifelong friend and when he died in 1929 at age 88, he was by far the oldest Aboriginal man in Victoria.

These excursions became even more regular after Willie and Tom's mother died in 1849. Lanky's parents, Murrum and Mary were then more than willing to take care of Willie and Tom on a daily basis. This could extend for several days when John was away carting goods, with the longest being a two week trek to Hanging Rock and back in November 1851.

Many stories of these hunting and walkabout adventures have been passed down our family. One tale I loved hearing was how Tom and Willie were taken duck hunting at Bolin-Bolin Billabong in Bulleen.

When they got to the billabong, a flock of ducks was contentedly paddling around in the middle. One of the men stood on the bank and successively threw three boomerangs over the billabong above the innocently cruising ducks. As each boomerang returned it was caught and thrown again, so that the three boomerangs were circling in the air at the one time.

The ducks all looked skyward, alert to the moving objects as maybe an eagle or hawk hunting them. Whilst the ducks' gaze was averted, another man with a dilly bag slipped into the billabong and swam out under the ducks. He could of course then see the legs of the ducks treading away in the gloomy water above him.

Reaching up he grabbed an unsuspecting duck by the feet, dragged it down and stuffed it into his dilly bag. The remaining ducks were none the wiser about their mate next to them suddenly disappearing with a neat plook, because none took flight. So he repeated the process half a dozen times. Maybe the remaining ducks just assumed that their mates had gone duck-diving.

Another trick in hunting ducks involved less exertion. A hole was dug in the soft earth of the river bank. Some worms were then broken up and placed in a line from the water up into the hole. The hunter then retired under a shady tree and waited. Fairly soon a duck would come out to eat the worms and make its way up into the hole.

Once in the tunnel the duck found out something it had never known before. Ducks can't walk backward. So it just sat there waiting for its neck to get wrung. Kentucky Fried Duck seemed to have been quite a popular meal in those days.

It is interesting that Willie and Tom were allowed to wander with their Aboriginal mates as far to the west of the bark hut as they liked. The story passed down about hunting at Bolin-Bolin in Bulleen is testament to that. However John their father completely prohibited them from going further east than the canoe tree that was about five hundred metres from Major Newman's homestead. John obviously made the rule to ensure that the boys didn't go with their friends onto Newman's land and risk being shot at by him.

All his life Tom told stories to his children and grandchildren about these early days and he always kept a range of artifacts and weapons for them to inspect. This is demonstrated in the story from the early 1920s when my mother was at primary school. Tom, her grandfather was by then nearly eighty. Mum and her brothers and sisters wanted to show him the new wonder of the age, a wireless crystal set radio.

Their grandfather listened briefly and dismissed it out of hand. He said that tribal people had radio receivers that they used every day before going hunting. John then got a spear from behind the kitchen door and took the children out into the paddock.

Tom drove the spear into the ground and got each child to put their ear to the end of the spear and listen carefully. He said Aboriginal people did this each morning and could tell everything that was happening in a two or three mile radius. They all took turns to listen and he then told them that the percussion they could hear through the spear was the kangaroos jumping in O'Brien's paddock over the next hill.

Tom passed down a treasure trove of such anecdotes that clearly showed the sophistication of Aboriginal thinking and the science embedded in their cultural practices.

Lanky (Ben) Manton (1841-1929) -The Last Initiated Man in Victoria

Lanky Manton was born at the Nerre-Nerre Warren Aboriginal Station north of Dandenong on 9th June 1841. His parents were Lanky Murrum aged 38 and Mary Lanky who was probably a decade younger. They were a Taungerong couple, but as Lanky was born on Ngaruk Clan Country, he was according to traditional law defined as a Woiwuring man.

Murrum and Mary had come from the Upper Goulburn to Melbourne in February 1841 with their eight year old son Billy. They established a strong ongoing relationship both with Simon Wonga and the Aboriginal Protector William Thomas. Through these relationships Murrum later adopted a Christian name of Simon and his younger son Lanky was given the Christian name of Benjamin.

Murrum and his family soon left the Nerre-Nerre Warren Reserve and settled in the Bulleen-Templestowe area where he also established a strong ongoing relationship with the settler John Chivers and his family. John's two sons Willie and Tom grew up with Murrum's two sons Billy Lanky and Ben Lanky and maintained a lifelong relationship with Ben. Murrum sent his sons to the Merri Creek Baptist School to learn to read and write, but after the death of Billibelleri in 1846 he withdrew them and took them bush so that they could be educated 'as real blackfellahs'.

In late 1851 Simon Wonga announced that a last great Kulin Federation corroboree was to be held at Pound Bend in Warrandyte in March 1852. Murrum approached Wonga and suggested that all the boys who had kept their culture and not drifted away to the urban fringes and become seduced into a lifestyle of alcohol and degradation, should be rewarded with formal initiation. They would then be able to participate in the Gaggip as adults. Wonga readily agreed and that this should be done straight away at the traditional initiation site Ngeyelong, now known as Hanging Rock.

Murrum then indicated a slight problem. Since the death of the wife of his friend John Chivers, Murrum and Mary had been regularly looking after his friend's two sons, Willie and Tom, when John was away carting goods. Because Willie and Tom had like their father learnt the language and embraced the culture, Wonga immediately agreed to the two settler children being part of the group. Some half-dozen Aboriginal boys, plus 11 year old Willie and 7 year old Tom Chivers, were accompanied by Wonga and Murrum plus a couple of other adults on the trek to Hanging Rock. The oldest of the group was Billy at 17 and the youngest Ben age 10. It was the last known group of boys subject to a traditional initiation ceremony in Victoria. They returned two weeks later as men and participated fully in the Gaggip of March 1852 at Warrandyte.

It is likely that Lanky's father Simon Murrum died around 1860 and this may have been a reason for Ben Lanky at age 19 heading to the Swan Hill area to take up droving. Being only five feet tall as a fully grown adult he was only jockey-size, but like so many Aboriginal people, he was also a gifted horseman. The oral history passed down his family clearly locates Lanky at Swan Hill in September 1860 when the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition passed through there. It seems that Lanky obtained work with a local pastoralist named Manton and as was common traditional practice, adopted his employer's surname, to now become Lanky Manton.

With the establishment of Coranderrk in 1863, Lanky returned after working for some ten years at Swan Hill. However a second person named Lanky Manton, who was twelve years younger, continued living in the Swan Hill area until the 1930's and their biographies later became confused. At Coranderrk, Lanky was able to renew his family's relationship with Simon Wonga, who

ultimately died of tuberculosis at age 53 in December 1874. Wonga was then succeeded as Headman by his cousin, William Barak.

Lanky also renewed his relationship with Tom and Willie Chivers, and was famed in the region for taking wild unauthorised rides on a chestnut horse to see his mates at Templestowe.

Some ten years after arriving at Coranderrk the now 39 year old Lanky married the 32 year old widow Annie Rees in February 1881. It is not clear how many children Lanky and Annie had, only that their youngest surviving child, Violet, was born in 1894. By the time of Violet's birth Annie was 46 and Lanky 53 and he had become an influential figure in the area. His sparkling wit, knowledge of cultural practices and engaging manner meant that he was extremely popular and respected by all, both at Coranderrk and in the wider community.

With the passing of William Barak in 1903 Lanky became a Senior Elder at Coranderrk. He was the virtual centrepiece of the tourist industry to the area, often giving fire lighting, artefact making and boomerang throwing exhibitions. However his public demonstrations were never free and he always obliged onlookers to show their appreciation in a tangible way.

Like Wonga and Barak before him, Lanky fought against the government moves to close Coranderrk and took any opportunity to address visiting dignitaries on the issue. However by 1923 the closure process had begun and among those relocated to Lake Tyers was Violet, the daughter of Lanky and Annie, along with her husband Alick Mullett, and their children. It was about this time in mid-1923 that Lanky made his last visit to Willie and Tom Chivers. His chestnut horse was by now long gone, so Lanky walked all the way from Coranderrk to Templestowe to say goodbye. He was by that time just turned 82 with Willie 83 and Tom 79.

Lanky and Annie were the oldest of the six elders who refused to move from Coranderrk and were given permission to stay on. However the pull of family became too much and toward the end of 1927 they agreed to relocate to Lake Tyers. Annie and Lanky were duly escorted by a female police officer on the lengthy train trip from Melbourne to Nowa-Nowa in East Gippsland, then by car to Lake Tyers. The policewoman was kept highly amused the whole way by Lanky's antics and witty observations and the repartee between Annie and Lanky.

The now toothless Lanky took a few possessions with him on the trip, one of which was a meat-mincing machine that he gleefully referred to as his 'false teeth'. The first part of the journey was the train trip from Healesville to Melbourne and they arrived in the evening. On seeing the electric lights of Melbourne, Lanky announced that they *'beat my firestick holler, but not in the bush, because you can't carry lectrie wires around'*

On the subsequent train trip out of Melbourne to Gippsland, Lanky insisted on being told the name of every railway station that they passed. Annie or he then often made comments to the great amusement of other travellers. For instance on passing the Longwarry station, Annie wryly noted about her husband: *'Like him, worry, worry, always worry.'* To which Lanky replied *'Never mind, all die bye and bye, so no long-worry.'*

After this memorable train trip then a car trip from Nowa-Nowa to Lake Tyers, the elderly couple were at last joyfully reunited with their children and grandchildren. Lanky lived there another 18 months and was most certainly by that time the oldest Aboriginal man in Victoria and the last initiated man. Lanky died on 26th May 1929 at the age of just on 88, with Annie surviving until August 1934, when she died at the age of 86. Lanky and Annie's memory and legacy still lives on through their Manton and Mullett family descendants.

STRANGE OLD UNCLE WILLIE

Willie Chivers was the older brother to my great-grandfather Tom Chivers. Willie never married and from 1913 at age 73, lived with Tom and great-grandma Emily. He was good with horses and other animals, and although he hardly spoke, my mother and her siblings were all fascinated by him.

When they visited their grandparents, Willie was usually pottering around the stables or sheds. On saying 'Hello Uncle Willie' they would usually get a grunt in reply. If lucky they might even get a grudging 'Hello' muttered back.

To mark these visits by her grandchildren, Emily often put on a special morning or afternoon tea of bread and jam, with Uncle Willie always joining them. Conversation at the dinner table by children was forbidden, so this silence suited Uncle Willie fine.

Mum said that Uncle Willie only ever spoke once on these occasions. He had dropped a few breadcrumbs on the tablecloth and Grandma Emily asked him to clean them up. So Uncle Willie licked his finger and one by one put the crumbs in his mouth, saying 'Bugger one, bugger two, bugger three...' and so on until he finished. All the children thought it was hilarious and giggled behind their hands, but Grandma Emily was not at all amused.

Mum said that they only once ever heard a whole sentence from Uncle Willie. He and Grandpa Tom were harnessing a horse together, with each working on different sides of the horse. Tom finished first and announced the fact to Willie, who responded, 'So you should be finished first, you're an infant compared to me.'

Willie was in fact only four years older than Tom. He was born in January 1840 in England and was only eight months old when his parents John and Mary Anne Chivers arrived in Australia in September 1840. John settled in Templestowe and immediately established close relationships with the local Aboriginal people. John was one of only two settlers I know of who learnt the local Woivurrung language.

In his earliest years Willie therefore only ever had Aboriginal playmates. So by the time he was a toddler, Willie was as fluent in Woivurrung as he was in English. Tom was born in 1844, so by the time Tom was himself a toddler Willie would piggy-back him around on adventures with his Aboriginal friends.

Many stories of their childhood adventures have been passed down the family and they maintained one particular lifelong friend, whose name I finally discovered was Lanky Manton. In the 1870's and 1880's Lanky often used to take wild rides on a chestnut horse from Coranderrk Aboriginal Station in Healesville, to visit Tom and Willie in Templestowe.

Other family members often commented that those walkabout days seemed to have left an even more indelible impression on Willie than on Tom. Relatives often remarked that Willie had 'gone native' as a result of his early experiences with Aboriginal people.

For instance in keeping with Aboriginal practice, Willie considered it entirely inappropriate to continue working once the sun had reached midday. Mornings were for hunting, but afternoons were spent in artistic, recreational or instructional activities. So Willie would just fiddle around or retire to a shady spot. By 1920 he was age 80 and would often just lie in a wheelbarrow for the rest of the afternoon.

Willie's reluctance to talk was epitomised by a story kept very hush-hush within the family. Tom and Emily had a visit one day from an old friend in the city who had ridden out to Templestowe to see them. After dinner and a long chat, their friend became very tired and did not feel up to riding home. So when he was offered the option of sharing Willie's double bed, he gratefully retired for the night.

In the morning Willie woke up and found the family friend dead and cold in bed next to him. This did not cause Willie any great consternation. He just wandered out to the kitchen, sat down and Emily served up his breakfast. When asked how his roommate had slept, Willie casually said 'He's dead' and continued eating. Tom and Emily immediately knew it was no joke and rushed off to check.

By 1923 Willie was aged 83 and clearly suffering dementia. It was at this time that Lanky Manton paid his final visit to tell them that Coranderrk was being closed the next year, and that Lanky's family had already been relocated to Lake Tyers. Two grandchildren listened in fascination while Tom and Lanky talked in language under a tree for hours, and Willie slept nearby in a barrow.

Willie lived for another six years after that and died in 1929 at age 89. Coincidentally, Lanky Manton also died that year at Lake Tyers, aged 88. He was then by far the oldest Aboriginal man in Victoria.