

Notes on Bungeleen¹ and the Stud Road Cemetery

Peter Gardner



Mrs Bartlett and Sgt. Bliss of Dandenong Police Station marking the pine-tree grave in 1981

Introduction

I have been researching and writing on the hunts for the white woman in Gippsland on and off for 50 years. These hunts took place in Gippsland in the 1840s. Europeans were searching for a - most probably ‘fictional’- woman held captive by the Kurnai and this was used as an excuse to hunt and harry them. Tyers later conservatively estimated that fifty Kurnai were killed in association with these hunts. My first essay on this was published in the Victorian Historical Journal in 1979 - an integral part of the tragic story of the Bungeleen family was later published in the same journal².

All this can be obtained in my early publications and the more recent online essay “In Pursuit of Bungeleen” (2017)³. The latter essay was primarily about the un-gazetted Aboriginal cemetery at the Stud Road Police Paddocks, my long story to establish beyond doubt the existence of this cemetery and the search for the burial place of Bungeleen. Since then I have been filmed on location at Stud Road for the Melbourne University School of Journalism and

rediscovered some slides of my 1981 visit with Mrs Bartlett to mark the cemetery, or more specifically the site of the fenced pine tree grave.

For some reason I cannot now recall I have been drawn to the Bungeleen story again. Possibly this was due to information a friend sent me about a recent public survey (Sept. 2023) on the Police Paddocks. The aim of this essay is to look at material I have not previously considered in any detail and also to round off the Bungeleen story. As with previous online essays I have used my old notes plus readily available sources – either digital or hard copy in our local library – and hope there is not too much repetition.

Bungeleen at Eagle Point

The first definite mention of Bungeleen is found in the anonymous diary of a member of the 2nd Expedition to recover the white woman. I have used notes from *The Kurnai of Gippsland* by Pepper and De Araugo to cover this section, as I pointed out “In Pursuit of Bungeleen” that I had omitted this source in my earlier studies⁴. The first problem with the diary is with the dates. The 2nd Expedition departed from Melbourne on 4 March 1847 and the same day the Native Police Day Book noted that “Sgt. Windridge with two Melbourne Natives + 2 Worrigles arrived from Melbourne on route to Gipps Land.” They left Narre Warren the next day after they had “received rations sufficient to take them to Gipps Land.” Two days later they had arrived at Eagle Point, arranged an expedition in two boats and already located Bungeleen and his family. Crown Lands Commissioner Tyers arrived on 9 March and directed that Bungeleen and his family be taken to Eagle Point. I find it hard to fit the events of the diary into this short passage of time even assuming that the camp where Bungeleen was found was only a short distance from Eagle Point⁵.

The second problem is one of the ‘authority’ behind the 2nd Expedition – who actually organised and authorised it. The first attempt to locate the white woman was by a band of Native Police under 3rd Officer WAP Dana. This was followed by the privately financed expedition led by DeVilliers and Warman who claimed a number of atrocities were committed against the Kurnai by the Native Police. The first months of 1847 saw these claims against the Native Police publicised. This meant the 2nd Expedition led by Sgt Windridge of the Border Police was quite separate from the Native Police, presumably under the direction of La Trobe and locally under the direction of Tyers. Thus we have the confusing situation of the Native Police and Border Police operating out of Eagle Point at the same time, both having been involved in the hunts for the white woman and further complicated by the fact that the Border Police were supposedly disbanded mid-1846.

Following the apprehension of Bungeleen and his family at Eagle Point there are a number of events recorded by Pepper and De Araugo that are not dated and are significant. Bungeleen must have quickly understood that he was being held against his will and absconded from Eagle Point with a Kurnai called Congallbar, who may have been his son. Congallbar drowned whilst swimming McMillans Straits to Raymond Island and Bungeleen then returned to Eagle Point. Bungeleen and family are then definitely confined whilst Tyers went to Melbourne to consult La Trobe presumably about Bungeleen and the search for the white woman. Tyers was absent 3 weeks and whilst away Bungeleen and family were kept under guard by Windridge in ‘3 watches’. All this occurred in the 30 to 40 days between

Bungeleen's apprehension and the trip he was to lead, or guide, into the mountains on the 19 April. A consultation of the original source in the State Library may clarify these matters.

On 19 April the expedition left Eagle Point and went, with Bungeleen supposedly leading the party, into the mountains to locate and rescue the white woman. The party included five Europeans and five Melbourne natives and presumably travelled north from the current vicinity of Sale/Maffra after a short boat journey from Eagle Point. Meanwhile Bungeleen's family were kept under the guard of five Native Police "as hostages". The diary notes the threats against the family and that "when they left for Melbourne they would take them with him to be hanged". By 4 May the expedition was back at Eagle Point, after an absence of 15 days, having failed to locate the white woman.

A month later Tyers had abandoned the 2nd Expedition and any official attempt to rescue the woman and then requested that Henry Dana of the Native Police take charge of his 'captives'. Towards the end of June a party consisting of four Europeans, seven Natives (includes Tackawarren and 2 other Kurnai) and the three adults and three children of the Bungeleen family, made their way from Eagle Point to Narre Warren. How long did this journey take? The first section by boat would have been covered relatively quickly, thereafter with a mixed party of those on horse and foot including three children would have been very slow travelling with a guestimate of the time to traverse the direct distance of about 160 kilometres of at least 5 days⁶. Perhaps it was during this journey that Bungeleen was chained to a gum tree as Thomas reported?

Other aspects of Bungeleen's captivity in Eagle Point include the supposed hostility towards him by Tyers who thought that he had "tricked" him. As well Tyers appears at best indecisive and intent on shifting the responsibility of these events and his 'hostages' onto others. There is also an undertone of antagonism between the various Aboriginal groups and between the Border Police and the Native Police. Eagle Point was abandoned by the Kurnai soon after the 2nd Expedition departed with Bungeleen's family for Narre Warren. There can be no doubt that Bungeleen and family were badly treated and Bungeleen was probably chained at various times during his captivity and on the journey to the Native Police headquarters. From their apprehension in March until their arrival at Stud Road already the family had been detained for more than 100 days.

Bungeleen at Narre Warren

On the 28 June 1847 the Day Book⁷ announced "The Late Gippsland Expedition Party arrived bringing Bungeleena and two lubras with their piccaninnies and handed them over to the Commandt of Native Police for the consideration of the government." And the following day "The Expedition Party still at the Station 4 Europeans 7 Natives... Bungeleena kept in custody but as little confined as possible to prevent his escape. A sentry placed on the wa(t)ch house with the door open to let in the air." The following week was a bustle of activity with regards the new arrivals.

On 30 June the Day Book noted "Sgt McGregor employed relieving the guard and attending to the Native captives" and on 1 July "Mr Wm Dana went to Melbourne to acquaint his Honor the Superintendent with Bungeleena also the Europeans – left the Station". The

following day Superintendent C.J. La Trobe “visited the Station saw Bungeeleena and inspected the men...” where he awarded the troopers 5/- each for their services.

More than a week later the Day Book noted “Same as previous day. Bungeeleena still in custody 2 hours exercise every day for the benefit of his health.” Another week went by before the next important visitor - “Mr. Robinson Chief Protector on the Station enquiring into the nature and fact of the western Port lubra which was formerly stole by Bungeeleena and is now in his possession”. Robinson was at Narre Warren making inquiries about Bungeelen’s lubra (Mumbalk) allegedly stolen from the Bunurong sometime previously. Almost certainly these claims were false and made to obtain possession of this woman. Mumbalk remained at Narre Warren and in this instance the claim was unsuccessful.

At the end of July the Day Book records “Bungeeleena & family still in custody very melancholy being detained so long” and early in August it was noted that “Robin, late trooper Native Police, confined in the top house for absconding. Bungeleena removed to Tailors shop” and the following day that “Bungeleena removed to the top house.” This change of imprisonment for Bungeelen was probably due to the fact that the desertion of “Robin” from the Native Police was considered a far more serious crime and his detention given priority. There is no further mention of Bungeelen in the Day Book from his removal to the ‘top house’ on 9 August 1847 until his death is noted on 21 November in 1848.

The Aboriginal Protectors, both Thomas and Robinson, also had information on the progress of the Bungeelen family, though the former is more solicitous. On 15 September 1847 Thomas notes that he had “served Bungeleenes with two pair new blankets”⁸ and in December it was mentioned that Commandant Henry Dana was to be authorised to return Bungeelen and his family to Gippsland. Early in January 1848 Robinson noted that Henry “...Dana called. Said Bungeelen was at Narree Narree Warreen and family, eaten up by venereal. Why not get a doctor to attend to him...”⁹ On 5 February Thomas noted that “Bungalene and family about to be returned to Gippsland”¹⁰.

However on a visit by Thomas on 21 March to Narre Warren to see the Bungeelen family he found them still there in good health and comprised of 3 adults and 3 children. Thomas noted in his Journal “... Bun-gee-lun & family (6 in all) & all well to my utter astonishment Bunge-lun was as sound as myself. Altho’ well in health, he was in an awful destitute state for covering”¹¹. Thomas visited again on 22 June where he found “no blacks but police & Bungalons family”. Mumbalk, and possibly one child, left Narre Warren about this time. It is possible she left of her own accord or she may have been removed from the rest of family sometime previously, perhaps as early as April. Thomas Journal noted “Moon-bulk died in July”¹² at an unidentified location called ‘Peronheup’ in the Western Port district and presumably at the time of her death was in the company of some Bunurong.

Bungeelen died on 21 November 1848. The Day Book noted “Dr Cutter returns to town...Bungeleena died” and that Dr Cutter had visited the day before “to see some men who were sick” whilst not specifically mentioning Bungeelen. On the following day the Day Book entry tells us “Bungeleena buried – all the men on the Station attended” and elsewhere mentioned that Dandenong Creek was in flood confining his burial site, and that of the cemetery, to the north of the creek. A few days later Thomas noted in his Journal “Old Pumpkin Murry had arrived from N.N. Warren with intelligence the Old Bungellun (hostage for the white woman) died on 22nd inst & was buried by the native Police, he must be about

56 years of age, leaving a wife & 2 children.”¹³ One month later Thomas wrote to George Robinson about the deaths of Bungeleen and Corporal Buckup¹⁴. He informed his superior that the deaths were “regular” and that they had been visited by “the Colonial Surgeon” and “the Aboriginal Natives further informed me that “Bungelleen” lubra was kindly treated at the Native Police Station”.

All told the Day Book mentioned Bungeleen nine times and the general ‘captives’ once out of 481 days of his family captivity at Stud Road. There is no evidence that he or his family were poorly treated by the Native Police other than that of William Thomas. However the general animosity that existed between the Melbourne tribes and the Kurnai suggests that they probably were. Being “chained to a gum tree” that Thomas remembered may have referred to Bungeleen’s captivity at Eagle Point or the trip to Narre Warren rather than at the Native Police Station where the Day Book mentions that Bungeleen is ‘confined’. Marie Fels¹⁵ may be right about the treatment of Bungeleen at Narre Warren and that the poor treatment he received was mainly at the hands of the Border Police. On the other hand Fels is definitely wrong about them not being held as ‘hostages’ and Bungeleen died whilst still imprisoned - waiting for his release and a return to ‘country’ that was never to happen.

There is some confusion between the burials of Corporal Buckup and Bungeleen who both died within a two months of each other. Buckup died on 2 October 1848 and the following day “Corporal Buckup was buried with military honors”. On 5 October “Men employed fencing in a grave” clearly indicating that the fenced grave was that of Buckup and not of Bungeleen. Mrs Bartlett’s memory was incorrect on this and the fenced grave was not that of a “Gippsland Chief”. On the other hand as I have stated previously almost certainly the fenced grave of Buckup also marks the cemetery and the grave of Bungeleen. It is of note that the ‘military honors’ accompanying Buckup’s burial possibly meant that he was buried with his sword and that he had only one leg, the other being amputated the previous year¹⁶.

Afterwards

Parley and her two children remained at Narre Warren for the remainder of the year and one suspects the children may have been poorly treated and neglected. On the 24 January 1849 Mrs Dana asked to have the 2 Bungeleen children in her care, a request which appears to have been ignored. By April 1849 Parley and her children were at Merri Creek, in July Thomas notes that “Find Bungaluns lubra at NN Warren”¹⁷ presumably without her children, and about this time she had an affair with a 15 year old student at the Merri Creek school. For most of 1850 Parley, or Kitty as she was now known, was at Narre Warren and may have been married to a Native Policeman. In January 1851 Parley died at Bulleen and in June the orphans John and Thomas Bungeleen, were placed in John Hinkins care. The full story of the orphans can be found in my *Through Foreign Eyes* or Pepper and De Araugo’s *The Kurnai of Gippsland*.

Addendum: The Cemetery

Henry Dana died in 1852 and the Native Police Station closed the following year. Time has allowed the cemetery of about 30 Aboriginal graves to sink into obscurity and disappear from

view. My efforts to locate the burial place of Bungeleen in the late 1970s led me to contact Mrs Bartlett and mark the approximate location of the 'pine tree grave' in 1981. See my "In Pursuit of Bungeleen" for full details of this. Then I mentioned the possibilities of using deep metal detectors (searching for an iron halo from an old picket fence, for brass buttons of buried troopers, and even possibly a sword in the case of Buckup) and advanced Lidar or other non-intrusive technology to locate the cemetery. Once located the exact number of burials can be ascertained, some identified, and due to Buckup's missing leg, the exact location of the fenced grave can be established. Another avenue of research may be a close examination of all photographs taken in and around the paddocks prior to World War II searching for anything resembling a fenced pine tree grave.

Perhaps the cemetery has already been located, and due to Aboriginal sensitivities, not been made public. I quite agree with this, but somewhere in the Police Paddocks a memorial should be erected letting the public know of the cemetery and perhaps include a brief account of the tragic story of Bungeleen and his family.

Notes

1. Spelling and terminology - there are various spellings of the name Bungeleen, including Bungulun, Bungelene, Bungaleen, Bungeleena and Bungil-ee-nee. Even my own records have varied as I have occasionally used Bungelene. William Thomas used a number of different spellings often with variations within a sentence or two. I have checked the spelling above where I can but if I too have erred here I apologise in advance. Likewise with the spelling of Narre Warren where I have used the modern version. Also note the use of 'Kurnai' which is historical and based on Howitt. 'Worrigals' with various spellings was one of the contemporary names for the Kurnai. Modern usage is 'GunaiKurnai'.
2. Gardner, Peter D. The Journals of DeVilliers and Warman in the Victoria Historical Journal 50:2:1979 and A Melancholy Tale in the VHJ 52:2:1981. These essays were later published as chapters in *Gippsland Massacres*, (Warragul Education Centre, Warragul, 1984) and *Through Foreign Eyes*, (Centre for Gippsland Studies, Churchill 1988). The family comprised Bungeleen his wives Parley and Mumbalk, 3 children – the later celebrated orphans John and Thomas Bungeleen and of the third child nothing is known.
3. Gardner, P.D. online essay at <https://petergardner.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/In-Pursuit-of-Bungeleen-2017.pdf>.
4. Pepper & De Araugo. *The Kurnai of Gippsland*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1985 pp.71-74. All the quotes and information about the 2nd Expedition sourced here unless otherwise stated. Note that I did read the 2nd Expedition diary in the White Woman manuscripts in the SLV (MS 10065) about 1976 but as I was concentrating on aspects of frontier violence at that time I decided not to include any quotes from it.
5. I suggest the possibility that Bungeleen and family were probably located on 17 March rather than 7 March.
6. The actual distance may have been closer to double ie 60K per day. It is not clear which route the party took to Narre Warren, whether by Port Albert or by the relatively new more direct route through the Latrobe Valley.
7. The Day Book of the Native Police Station online at <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/EAC792F0-F303-11E9-AE98-154DB8463DD6?image=1> All quotes taken from this source unless otherwise stated.
8. Stephens, M. *The Journal of William Thomas*, Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, Melbourne, 2014, Vol.2 I have mislaid the exact page number and hope the date 15.9.1847 will suffice.
9. Ian D. Clark (ed) *The journals of George Augustus Robinson, chief protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate*, Melbourne, Vic. Heritage Matters, 2000 Vol. 5 p.197 The account of Henry Dana has Bungeleen diseased but offers no real diagnosis. I suspect that Dana had little interest in the Bungeleen

- family other than that which was officially required of him. Note Clark has Bungeleen “chained to a log” and incorrectly “He died a few weeks later” p.297
10. Stephens, M. *The Journal of William Thomas...* vol.2 p.294
 11. Ibid vol.2 p.302
 12. Ibid. Note that the Thomas record contradicts the account given by Henry Dana to Robinson on Bungeleen’s health.
 13. Ibid. vol.2 p.343
 14. Thomas to Robinson “Respecting the deaths of Bungellan and Bugup" VPRS 11/P0000, 710 <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/4C93D8AE-F7F0-11E9-AE98-5B9FE2E5811D?image=1>
 15. Fels, Marie Hansen. *Victorian Archaeological Survey Reports on the Dandenong Police Paddocks*, Occasional Report 25 Vol 2, 1990 where Fels is critical of Thomas' claim that Bungeleen was chained to a gum tree and of the family being held as hostages. See her *Good Men and True*, MUP, Melbourne, 1988 (copy in the EGFHG library) for a thorough and sympathetic history of the Native Police.
 16. Stephens, M. *The Journal of William Thomas...* vol.2 p.276
 17. Ibid. p.421

First published in The Black Sheep No.119 Dec. 2023