

YARRI



AND THE '52 FLOOD

Front Cover: Yarri Memorial, Gundagai.

© Geoff Burch. January 2024.

Introduction

The impetus for this article began when I posted a photo on Facebook declaring it to be that of Yarri, the Aboriginal man who rescued a number of people in the 1852 Gundagai flood.

When several people questioned whether this was in fact a photo of Yarri, a quick check by myself soon made me realise my mistake. The photo was in fact of another Aboriginal man. What really got my attention though was the number of people who viewed the post. This was a subject of interest to a lot of people.

This article is seen as a foundation stone – a platform on which additional research can be added. I expect that some of the information in the article will be challenged. I am hopeful that others will be able to provide additional information and perspectives.

The 1852 flood at Gundagai still stands as one of Australia's greatest natural tragedies. Many accounts of the event persist in perpetuating false information. Yarri is generally credited with saving the most lives, but the available sources indicate that it was Jackie who saved the most lives. Yarri has been credited with saving anything from 49 to 100 lives, when in reality there are only some ten people identified as being saved by him.

None of the above diminishes the significance of what several Aboriginal men did in 1852 – they saved many white Europeans from certain death – men, women and children. Their efforts deserve to be recognised and commemorated.

After my initial mistake I believe that I have now found a photo of Yarri, which is included in this article.

Anyone with comments, or information, can contact the author at the following email address - geoffrey.burch@bigpond.com

WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples please note that this publication contains images and names of people who have passed away.

This is a white person's interpretation of events. Indigenous Australians may well have a different story, and/or perspective.

Yarri [aka Yarrie, Yarry, or Yarrey]

Yarri, in its various forms of spelling, appears to have been a not uncommon name amongst Aboriginal peoples of Australia. One of the earliest references to such a name was in February 1841. In that month Edward John Eyre gave an account of his trip from Fowler's Bay to Western Australia. His entourage included three young Aboriginal boys, named, Wylie, Joey and Yarrey [also spelt Yarry in the same report]. The latter two men were both native to NSW.¹

It is likely that some of these names were white European influenced derivatives of the actual native names. Yarry [in various forms] appears to be an Aboriginal word in some First Nation Peoples languages.

Other Aboriginal men named Yarri were,

1. In August 1855, in the Maitland Court, Henry Brown, alias Yarry, an Aboriginal native, was convicted of rape, and sentenced to death.²
2. In June 1868 it was reported that an Aboriginal man named Yarry had passed away at the Wagga Wagga hospital. The cause of his death was lockjaw, resulting from an injury to his thumb when he fell over.³
3. In February 1883, an Aboriginal man named Johnny Yarry was assaulted, at the Adelong Crossing [Tumblong].⁴ [Note: See Wagga Wagga papers for various references to Jimmy Yarry or Jemmy Yarry]
4. In August 1883, James McDonell, alias Jimmy Yarry was arrested at Gundagai, under a warrant issued by the Wagga Wagga Bench.⁵ This may have been the man referred to as Jemmy Yarry, in several Wagga Wagga reports.
5. In May 1902 two Aboriginal men were drinking at the Boolabadah hotel [near Hay]. It was alleged that the two men quarrelled and that one of the men, Jack Johnson [alias Moolbong Jackie] struck the other man, Yarry, over the head with a bicycle pump causing his death. It was further alleged that Johnson and another Aboriginal man buried Yarry.⁶
6. In June 1902, a memoriam recorded that John Brown, better known as "Yarri", had passed away at the Brungle Mission. He was said to be in excess of seventy years old.⁷
7. In May 1907, "King Yarry," the leader of the local Aboriginal population in the Walcha district, passed away at the age of almost one hundred years. He was well known in the district, well liked and respected.
8. In October 1933, a Gundagai local declared that there were three Aboriginal men named Yarrie, living in the district, and that one of these had died in a tent at the Gundagai Hospital.⁸

¹ Sydney Monitor. 25th August 1841, p4.

² Sydney Morning Herald. 22nd August 1855, p4.

³ Gundagai Times. 20th June 1868, p2.

⁴ Gundagai Times. 13th February 1883, p2.

⁵ Gundagai Times. 7th August 1883, p2.

⁶ The Advertiser [Adelaide]. 20th May 1902, p6.

⁷ Gundagai Independent. 14th June 1902, p2.

⁸ Gundagai Independent. 12th October 1933, p5.

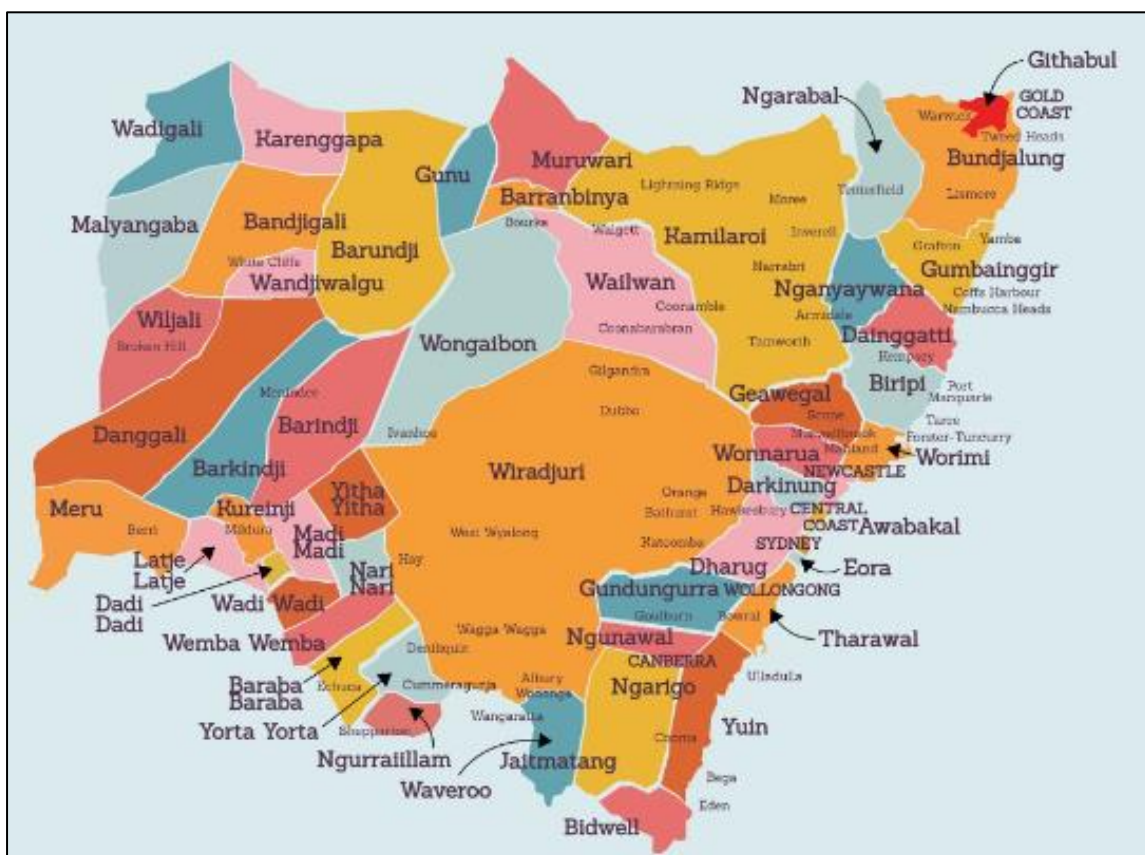
The role of several Aboriginal men in the rescue of those isolated by the 1852 flood at Gundagai has been well recognised from the time of the original event. The precise details of who rescued who are much more ambiguous, and falsely documented in many instances.

When the local Commissioner for Crown Lands, Lachlan District, Edward Beckham, wrote to the Colonial Secretary in July 1852, he noted that, *“Four of the Aboriginal natives were very active during the flood, and saved many lives and much property.”*⁹

McIntyre lists four Aboriginal men, three of whom; Yarri, Jackey and Tommy Davis, are known to have been presented with breastplates. There are no known primary sources that identify the 4th man, nor is there any known evidence of a fourth breastplate being presented to any individual.

Only one person was identified as having been rescued by *“Tommy”* and presumably this refers to Tommy Davis. It may well be that he assisted Jackey, or others, in managing the canoe or boat, or in helping those rescued reach dry land.

The First Nations People who occupied the area we know as Gundagai, were part of the Wiradjuri Nation. To the east, lay the countries of the Ngunnawal and Ngarigo Nations.



Above: A map showing the approximate boundaries of Aboriginal Nations within NSW. Courtesy NSW Department of Education. [Based on the AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia].

⁹ Correspondence. Beckham to Colonial Secretary. 16th July 1852. Part of Papers relative to Gundagai. Legislative Council, Votes & Proceedings. 1852, vol.2, p.245. [Taken from *The Watermen of Gundagai*, p7].

The Breastplates

The Gundagai Flood in 1852 claimed some ninety five lives, virtually wiping out a large percentage of the population of that town. Numerous reports confirm that a number of the inhabitants were saved by two or more local Aboriginal men. The accounts vary, but generally Yarri has been credited with saving the most lives. Bingham credits four Aboriginal men with providing assistance but only three have been identified – Yarri, Jackey, and Tommy Davis.

Each of the aforementioned men were presented with a breastplate with identical wording.

In May 1912, a Mr E Perkins of Cooma claimed to be in possession of a breastplate presented to an Aboriginal man named Tommy Davis. Perkins claimed the breastplate had been presented to Davis in recognition of his efforts in rescuing a number of people during the 1852 Flood.¹⁰ According to Perkins, Davis, Jacky, and Yarry [sic] all received engraved breastplates. The breastplates were all crescent shaped. The breastplate of Davis was found in a disused bark hut once occupied by him [Davis] and given to Perkin's mother. The engraving on the breastplate read as follows,¹¹

“Presented to Tommy by the subscribers of a relief fund, as a reward for his assisting the sufferers during the floods at Gundagai on the 25th June, 1852.”

In December 1926, EM of Manly [possibly Edward Morley, the son of Joseph Dillon Morley?] submitted a letter to the editor of the local Gundagai paper confirming the plaque presented to Davis was now in his possession, it haven been given to him by his father, the latter being a survivor of the '52 flood. EM stated that the breastplate featured an engraving of an Aboriginal man in a canoe rowing towards a white man sheltering in a tree. EM suggested Jackey and Tommy Davis might be one and the same,¹² but such a claim is contrary to other evidence.

It is not known where the breastplate presented to Tommy Davis ended up, so it has not been possible to inspect same. The current location of this artifact, if it still exists, is unknown.

The breastplate presented to Yarri, and a replica of the breastplate presented to Jackey, are held in the Gundagai Museum. An inspection of these two confirmed that the same wording appears on each of the three breastplates, and that each features a similar graphic.

The two breastplates in the Gundagai Museum are quite different. The breastplate presented to Yarra [sic] is of a solid brass construction with an older fashioned style of writing. It is the usual colour for brass.

The replica breastplate presented to Jackey is quite different. It is thinner material and is reddish or a copper like in colour. The writing appears to be more contemporary with much sharper etching. This breastplate is a copy of the original.

The original breastplate presented to Jackey was discovered by Dick Medcalf when he was ploughing a paddock on his property, “*Warralonga*”, at Tenandra. The brass medallion featured a chain, and after a clean-up by Medcalf, the text and drawing were clearly visible. The breastplate was on display in the office of the *Gundagai Independent* newspaper for a short period, following its discovery, but for the next ten years, or so, it resided on the wall of the *Warralonga* homestead.¹³

¹⁰ Gundagai Independent. 27th March 1912, p4.

¹¹ Gundagai Independent. 27th March 1912, p4.

¹² Evening News. 15th December 1926, p12.

¹³ Gundagai Independent. 2nd June 1958, p1.

When the property was sold, c.1969, the breastplate remained with the property, with a request that it continue to reside on the property, eternally.¹⁴ It is believed that when the property next changed hands, the breastplate had gone. It is not known where the original breastplate presented to Jackey now resides. The breastplate in the Gundagai Museum is clearly a copy, but it is not known when it was struck?

The text on the replica breastplate reads as follows,

“Presented to Jackey by the subscribers of a relief fund, as a reward for his assisting the sufferers during the floods at Gundagai on the 25th June, 1852.”

In February 1880 Yarri called into the offices of the local Gundagai paper to ask if they could take steps to bring his situation to the notice of the government, in order that he might be given a pension. Yarri stated that as a young man he had assisted Hume and Hovell to cross the Murrumbidgee in 1824. [Was this the same Yarri that travelled with Edward Eyre in 1840-1841?] The paper highlighted Yarri’s efforts in saving what they declared to be thirty lives, in the ’52 Flood, and lamented the fact that his actions had never been officially recognised, even going so far as to note “*not even the usual brass plate.*”

If this report was correct, and Yarri had not been presented with a *brass plate* at that time, then it would have had to have been struck between February and July 1880, before Yarri’s death in July 1880.

The evidence suggests the breastplate had been presented at an earlier date. A report in February 1873 stated that Yarri had been presented with his breastplate before that date.¹⁵

A report in June 1855, suggested that the funds raised to help victims of the 1852 flood had not all been distributed, noting that one recommendation had been the presentation of brass breastplates to “*the two aborigines who were on the occasion instrumental in saving the lives of many persons,*” but this had yet to be put into effect.¹⁶ This would place the presentation of the breastplates between 1855 and 1873.

Unfortunately, there are no sources that record when any of the three Aboriginal men were presented with their individual breastplate.

In July 2010 two items were stolen from the Gundagai Museum – Yarri’s breastplate and the breastplate of Brungal Tommy [not related to the flood]. One year later, the museum personnel were planning to fabricate replicas, having given up on ever seeing the originals again, but almost to the year a parcel arrived from Redland Bay in Queensland, with a return address listed as “Yarra, Murrumbidgee River, Gundagai.” The two artefacts had been returned, safely, and undamaged. An article on the incident noted that Yarri’s plaque had been discovered in a paddock at Cootamundra, in 1990, and donated to the museum.¹⁷

[Tommy Brungle was presented with his breastplate in 1842. It was inscribed “*Brungal Tommy, King of Brungal. The gift of John Keighrer.*” In addition to the text, the breastplate featured a number of etchings – “*an emu, a blackfellow with suspended spear, and a gin with a boomerang [sic] in hand.*” The crescent shaped brass breastplate, with steel chain, was found by Mr JT Lamb, laying in the bush at Brungal.¹⁸

¹⁴ Helen Milne [nee Medcalf], the daughter of Dick Medcalf. 1st August 2021.

¹⁵ Sydney Morning Herald. 4th February 1873, p5.

¹⁶ Sydney Morning Herald. 9th June 1855, p3.

¹⁷ Newspaper article. 18th July 2011. Vol.110, No.24. [presumably the local Tumut/Gundagai paper].

¹⁸ Adelong & Tumut Express. 13th March 1908, p2.

Some Local Aboriginal Men Named Yarri and Jackey

Yarri [aka John Brown]

In January 1888 Yarry [sic] [aka John Brown] was convicted of stealing a suit of clothes from Joseph Ferrard, a fettler on the railway. Yarri claimed he must have been pretty drunk as he couldn't remember who gave him the clothes, which had been found in his possession at Brungle.¹⁹ Yarri was sentenced to a month's imprisonment in the Gundagai gaol. The police stated that Yarri's rations would be stopped, because "*he was always knocking about the town and would not work at home.*"

On the 25th May 1888, an Aboriginal man named Yarry, appeared in the Gundagai Court, charged with being drunk, but was let off on the basis that it was the Queen's birthday he was celebrating.²⁰ This was possibly John Brown.

In March 1889 Yarri [alias John Brown] was convicted of drunkenness and fined £1 or four days in gaol. He chose the latter option.²¹

In 1896 the then Catholic Coadjutor-Bishop, Dr Gallagher, planned to visit the Aboriginal camp at Brungle for the purpose of rendering confirmation on a number of the local natives, one of whom was John Brown [aka Yarry]. It was said of John Brown that he was, "*widely and favourably known in the district, and is remarkable as well for the versatility of his genius as he is for the unique formation of his head. The local medical gentlemen state that they believe there is not such another head in the world.*"²²

In June 1902 it was reported that the Aboriginal, John Brown, better known as Yarri, had passed away at the Brungle Mission Station. He was said to be over seventy years old.²³

One report declared that, "*Brown was a kind of uncrowned king of the local aborigines; ..His whole life has been spent amongst the Brungle and Yass tribes.*"²⁴

Yarri [aka John Brown] was not one of the Aboriginal men that saved lives in the 1852 flood.

¹⁹ Gundagai Times. 24th January 1888, p2.

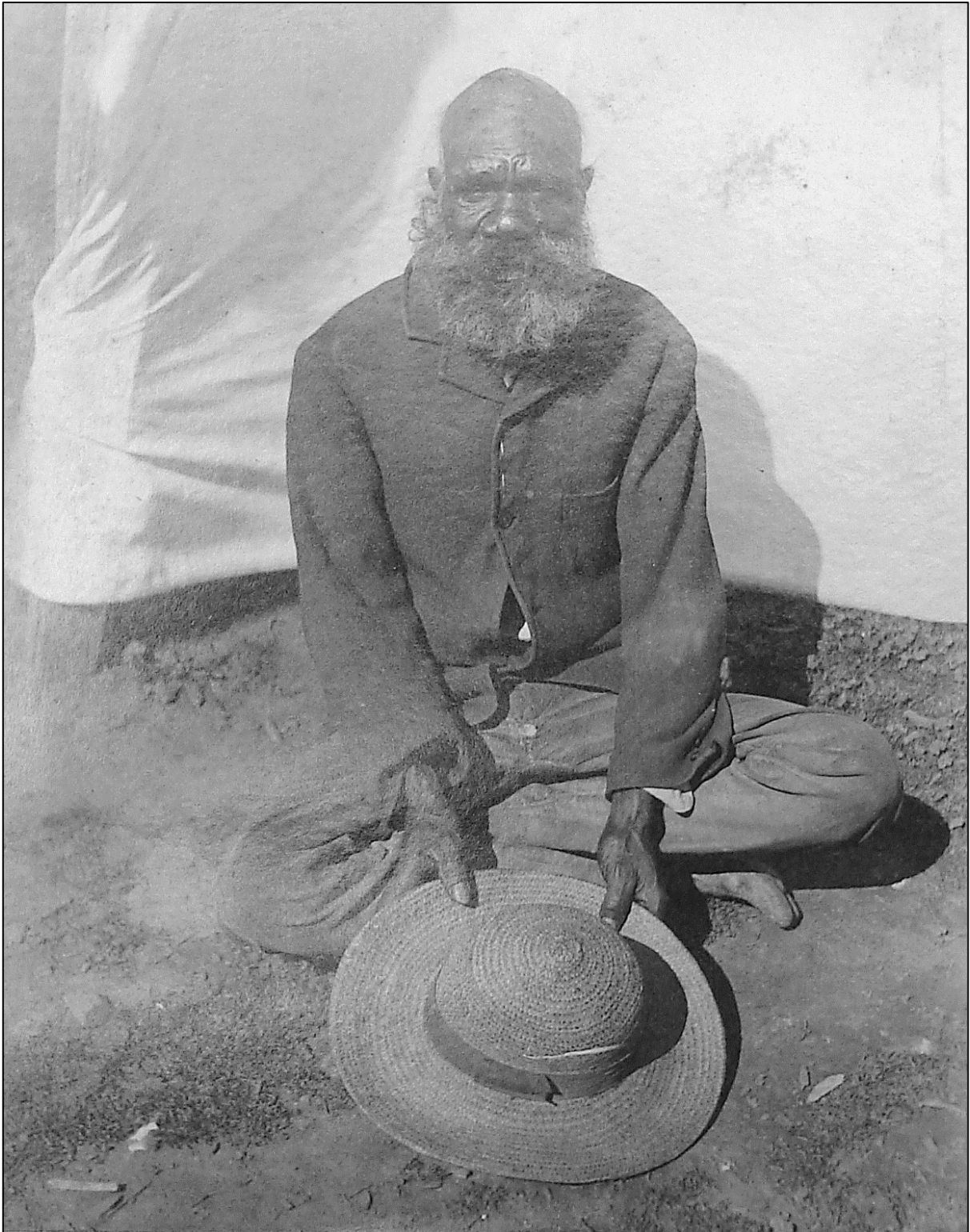
²⁰ Gundagai Times. 29th May 1888, p2.

²¹ Gundagai Times. 29th March 1889, p2.

²² Catholic Press. 12th September 1896, p15.

²³ Gundagai Independent. 14th June 1902, p2.

²⁴ Albury Banner. 13th June 1902, p28.



Above: John Brown of Brungle Station. A pencilled note below the photo reads, "*John Brown alias Yarry.*" Courtesy NSW State Library. [PXA.659]

Yarri [the Aboriginal man who saved lives in the '52 Flood]

Yarri was said to have been born around 1810. He was baptised, as James McDonnell, in the Catholic Church at Gundagai on the 16th August 1875.²⁵ It is believed that McDonnell was the name of the family who he lived with at that time.²⁶

Yarri was said to be the leader, or king, of the local Aboriginal population at Gundagai.

According to James Gormly, Yarri had been shepherding for his father [Patrick Gormly] at Nangus.²⁷

Yarri was presented with a brass breastplate, suitably inscribed, to recognise his efforts in rescuing people during the 1852 flood.²⁸ It is not known when the breastplate was presented, but it was prior to 1873.²⁹

According to Charlie Ledwidge, an old resident of Gundagai, Yarri was also presented with some clothing, by the government, in recognition of his actions. This consisted of a bell-topper hat, a frock coat, and white moleskin trousers, which Yarri wore for many years.³⁰

When the Earl of Belmore [the governor of NSW 1868-1872] passed through the Adelong Crossing Place [now Tumblong] during that period, his coach pulled up at the local hotel where “King Yarrie” was seated on a bench under the verandah of the hotel. According to one report the following exchange took place,³¹

"Hello, good day, boss! You been the Guvner, are you?"

"Yes, I'm the Governor — who are you?"

"Oh, I'm higher man than you, boss."

"Ye; how's that?"

"Oh, well, you only been the Governor—I'm the king!"

Yarri had a partner named Sally [aka Black Sally], who, in 1873, was very ill. In February of that year it was reported, “*she has again been tapped and her recovery is doubtful.*”³² Sally was camped in a paddock belonging to Mr J Plows on Big Ben Creek, at the time. She was attended by Dr Henderson who operated and drew off close to nine and a quarter quarts of fluids from her body.³³

On Monday 3rd March 1873 Sally passed away at Gundagai. Her death was attributed to dropsy. A press report declared that she had been “*tapped twice*” and that she finally died from neglect.³⁴

In 1926, a mound of dirt near a big box tree stump, on the road to Mr JC McLean’s home at Big Ben, marked the spot where Sally was buried, and where she still, presumably, rests.³⁵ **[Where is this?]**

²⁵ Interpretive Signage. Located adjacent to the Yarri Memorial at Gundagai.

²⁶ Allen Crooks. *Yarri*.

²⁷ Gundagai Times. 18th May 1915, p2.

²⁸ Gundagai Times. 24th June 1919, p2.

²⁹ Sydney Morning Herald. 4th February 1873, p5.

³⁰ Daily Advertiser. 7th September 1944, p4.

³¹ Daily Advertiser. 29th September 1930, p4.

³² Gundagai Times. 8th February 1873, p2.

³³ Gundagai Times. 24th June 1919, p2.

³⁴ Gundagai Times. 8th March 1873, p2.

³⁵ Gundagai Independent. 11th October 1926, p2.

Towards the end of April 1874 Yarrri led his people into town [Gundagai] to receive their yearly allocation of blankets. A report in the local press highlights the injustices of their situation.³⁶

“On Tuesday twenty-eight of the aboriginals connected with this locality received their new blankets. These comfortable articles are generally given to them on the anniversary of the birthday of our Queen, whose predecessor was graciously pleased to take possession of the aboriginal's country; but as the weather is becoming cold, and the blankets were to hand, our Police Magistrate anticipated the usual date of distribution. Led by Yarrri the sable recipients afterwards proceeded to the front of the Court-house, and gave three cheers for the Queen, subsequently departing across the Alfred Bridge in high spirits. Two or three little girl darkies and about an equal proportion of boys seemed especially delighted with the new coverings they had acquired; and chattered to each other and showed their white teeth very gleefully.”

The writer clearly recognises the irony in the gratitude of Yarrri and his people to the very people responsible for stealing their land.

In June 1879 a traveller passing through South Gundagai observed what he termed, “*individuals, whom, he supposed, would expect to be considered men,*” maltreating an old Aboriginal man, who he ascertained was “*old Yarrri,*” the same man that had saved so many lives in the 1852 flood. The traveller was disgusted by the behaviour of these “*white rascals.*”³⁷

In March 1880, John B Gribble, the superintendent at *Warangesda* mission, wrote a letter to the editor of the Gundagai Times, which read as follows,³⁸

“Sir, — Having noticed that you have several times called public attention to the pressing and most reasonable claims of the poor old blackfellow Yarrri, I hereby take the liberty of informing the public of Gundagai, through the medium of your paper, that a new aboriginal mission station is about to be established at Darlington Point for the accommodation of the Murrumbidgee blacks; and, if some steps can be taken to secure his conveyance to Darlington Point, via Narandera, I will undertake to meet him and provide him with the essential comforts of life during the remainder of his earthly sojourn.”

In July 1880 Yarrri was said to be close to passing on,³⁹ and on the 24th of that month he passed away, at the Gundagai Hospital. He had suffered for some time from an aneurism in the knee and had been a patient at the hospital for the past three weeks.⁴⁰ He had previously been admitted to the hospital, in April, and it had been suggested, at that time, that he be sent to the Sydney Infirmary. Yarrri declined this offer and another from the superintendent of the Aboriginal Mission at Darlington Point, declaring that he “*b'long Gundagai,*” and within a few days he slipped away, preferring to be elsewhere.⁴¹

³⁶ Gundagai Times. 2nd May 1874, p2.

³⁷ Gundagai Times. 27th June 1879, p2.

³⁸ Gundagai Times. 9th March 1880, p3.

³⁹ Gundagai Times. 23rd July 1880, p4.

⁴⁰ Gundagai Times. 24th August 1880, p4. / 27th July 1880, p2.

⁴¹ Gundagai Times. 2nd April 1880, p2.

Yarri's body was buried in the Roman Catholic portion of the Gundagai Cemetery.⁴² Unfortunately in 2021 the location of that grave is not known. A headstone has been installed at the entry to the Catholic section of the Gundagai Memorial Cemetery, in his honour.

In April 1937 two old residents, James Harlow and Edward Jamieson, claimed to be the only two people who knew where Yarrie [sic] was buried. Mr Harlow claimed that Yarrie [sic] was buried on Brummy's Hill, between the homes of Tom and Charlie Fields. Harlow stated that in the 1880's the old Bengarralong Road ran over Brummy's Hill, and that on the flat was an Aboriginal camp.⁴³ It is not known which Yarri, this report refers to, but clearly it cannot be to the Yarri who saved lives in the 1852 flood.

One of the people that Yarri saved was a man named William Weatherby [1812-1884], who went on to own a boot store in Yass. Yarri would travel up to Yass on occasions and visit the store, where he was treated as a guest of honour and allowed to choose a number of pairs of boots, which he would subsequently sell for a few shillings. In 1925, William Weatherbey's son, Jim [1846-1933], who then conducted the business at Yass, proposed registering a trade mark for his boots, consisting of "a black fellow paddling in a big boot in a flood tossed stream."⁴⁴ [Note: Several articles refer to Jim Weatherby, both senior and junior, each of whom was christened William]

When William Weatherby [1846-1933] passed away at Yass in July 1933, it was recorded that he was born at Gundagai in 1846 [17th April 1846 actually]⁴⁵ and that he had survived the '52 flood, thanks to "Jackie Douglas", an aboriginal man who had rescued him from the old mill building.⁴⁶ This contradicts the 1925 account [above paragraph], which was given by the same man – Weatherby [1846-1933]. The 1925 account refers to Yarri rescuing Weatherby in his "cockle shell canoe," and records that Weatherby [1846-1933] visited the site where Yarri had landed his father, safely in 1852. It appears that the article in the 1933 Goulburn Penny Post was erroneous. It is not known who Jackie Douglas was.

Yarri Photograph

The photo on the following page is believed to be Yarri. It was taken by the firm of G Bridle of Tumut. The original is a small photo, not much bigger than a credit card. The subject can be seen to be wearing a brass plate, identical to the one that now rests in the Gundagai Museum, and on the back of the photo is a 2nd photo, of the brass breastplate. This latter photo is most definitely of the breastplate presented to Yarri [or Yarra].

The photo was found in a folder containing material related to Alexander Thorley Bolton, which had been collected by Keith Swan, and which is now part of the Wagga Wagga & District Historical Society collection, held at CSU Regional Archives [RW2893-9].

Timeline

Yarri died on the 24th July 1880, which meant that twenty six years had passed since his heroic acts in 1852.

If it is true that he was born in 1810 then he would have been forty two years old in 1852, and seventy years old at the time of his death. This would imply that Yarri was in his sixties when the photo was taken, which is consistent with the features of the man in the photo.

⁴² Gundagai Times. 27th July 1880, p2.

⁴³ Gundagai Independent. 24th April 1937, p3.

⁴⁴ Gundagai Independent. 9th February 1925, p2.

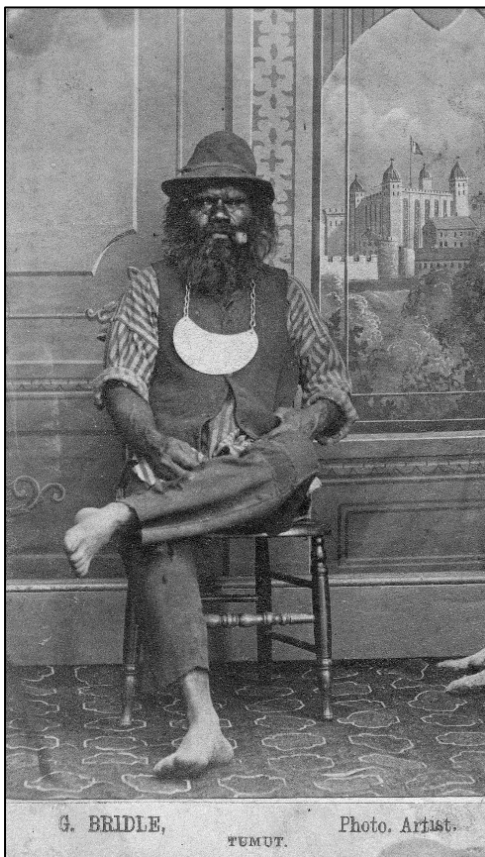
⁴⁵ Australia Births & Baptisms: 1792-1981. Baptised at Yass on the 7th July 1846 [ancestry].

⁴⁶ Goulburn Evening Penny Post. 11th July 1933, p2.





Above: The photo of the brass breastplate that appears on the back of the photo of Yarri held at CSU Regional Archives.



The text on the breastplate reads as follows,

“Presented to Yarra by the subscribers of a relief fund, as a reward for his assisting the sufferers during the floods at Gundagai on the 25th June, 1852.”

Left: The text at the bottom of the photo of the Aboriginal man shows that it was taken by G Bridle of Tumut.



Above: The original breastplate presented to Yarra, as held by the Gundagai Museum. Courtesy Gundagai Historical Museum.



Left: The family of William and Martha Bridle, with their son, George Bridle [centre back]. Courtesy [bridle_babe](#) [Ancestry]

Tumut Agency.

MR. G. BRIDLE, Printer, Stationer, &c., is appointed Agent for this Journal at **Tumut**, and will receive the names of intending Subscribers, Advertisements, &c.

N.B. Single copies of the *Wagga Wagga Advertiser* may be had of Mr. **Bridle**.

January 22, 1870.

Left: A Mr G Bridle was in business at Tumut in January 1870, and possibly earlier.⁴⁷

HELIOGRAPHY !!

G. BRIDLE has taken those Premises in Fitzroy-street, next to the Court House, **Tumut**, and is now prepared to take Views within one mile of his Gallery, and Portraits, for Cash only, at the following prices, —

| | First copy | Additional copies each | Dozen copies |
|---------------------------------|------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Carte-de-visite, adults & views | 5s | 1s | 10s |
| Children (under 4 years)..... | 10s | 1s | 20s |
| Cabinet size..... | 7s 6d | 2s | 20s |
| Large cabinet size | 10s | 3s 6d | 40s |

Glass Pictures in Frames and Cases 2s each and upwards. Hours for portraits from 9 till 4 o'clock. Copies of all photographs taken by **G. B.** in the different parts of New South Wales that he has travelled, can be obtained from him cheap.

G. B. will not praise himself as his work will do that, which can be seen at his Gallery, where any further information can be obtained.

Country orders promptly attended to. Picture frames all sizes procured from Sydney, or made to order at reasonable prices.

Above: Notice of G Bridle's new business in August 1872.⁴⁸

In 1872, G Bridle of Tumut was a correspondent for the Illustrated Sydney News.⁴⁹

Final Notice.

G. BRIDLE
WILL SHORTLY CLOSE

HIS studio in Gundagai, so persons wishing to get really
FIRST-CLASS PHOTOGRAPHS
please take notice.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Of all kinds taken and finished in the finest style of the art at Sydney Prices in

G. BRIDLE'S STUDIO,
near Leary's Criterion Hotel, GUNDAGAI.

THIS renowned photographer will stay in Gundagai for a very short time.

Previous engagements advisable, to prevent waiting or disappointment.

Satisfaction given or no charge.

Note the address—Near Mr. Leary's Criterion Hotel, on the flat, where a **RED FLAG** with the word
PHOTOGRAPHER
in white letters on it will be seen floating over the tent.

G. BRIDLE,
PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTIST.

N.B.—All Photographs guaranteed equal to those in his Show Cases.

Above Right: Advertisement placed by G Bridle in July 1885.⁵⁰

It appears that Bridle was working in Germantown in 1886, Albury in December 1886,⁵¹ and Wodonga in 1887.⁵²

The photo taken by G Bridle was presumably taken between January 1870, when he started business in Tumut, and the 24th July 1880, when Yarri passed away. The period during which G Bridle conducted a photography business at Tumut and Gundagai, is consistent with the time period in which Yarri resided in the district.

The available evidence suggests that the photo is of Yarri, who saved numerous lives in the '52 flood.

⁴⁷ Wagga Wagga Advertiser. 26th January 1870, p3.

⁴⁸ Gundagai Times. 31st August 1872, p3.

⁴⁹ Illustrated Sydney News. 20th January 1872, p2.

⁵⁰ Gundagai Times. 21st July 1885, p3.

⁵¹ Wodonga & Towong Sentinel. 31st December 1886, p3.

⁵² Wodonga & Towong Sentinel. 18th February 1887, p3. / 31st December 1886, p3.

Poetry Dedicated to Yarri

In April 1880, EHB Gullen, published the following poem in the local Gundagai press,⁵³

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>“Old Yarri Gladly of Australia's wealth and worth Bright praines are rung forth; Proudly the white man boasts Of his land from south to north.</p> <p>Ages have run since the conquering White man trod the soil, Where dark-skinned men roamed free as air, Nor dreamt of drink nor toil.</p> <p>But the pale face came to conquer, The black must droop and die; He has no land, no home, no friends, And his end is drawing nigh.</p> <p>O valley of mist and sunshine! O land where the river swells! O land of peace and plenty? What tale is this you tell?</p> <p>A tale of a time when your waters Swept down with destruction and death, Leaving, of all the life and health, Alas! nought but the grave's chill breath.</p> <p>Away! To the hills! to the tree-tops! Some few escaped from the doom, And saw as the waters receded The wrecks of once happy homes.</p> <p>Over the turbid waters A frail bark comes and goes; Saving the lives of survivors, The lives of the black man's foes;</p> <p>One dark-skinned man goes bravely O'er the dangerous, surging stream; To save the life of his fellow-man; And the sequel who will dream?</p> | <p>At the risk of his life, Old Yarri Saved many a thankful one, Thankful? Ah, yes! believe it Until the deed was done.</p> <p>Now youth, and strength, and health have fled, And Yarri must wandering roam, Aged, and ill, and sinking fast, With neither friend nor home.</p> <p>O statesmen of our country! O members of our plain! Is it beneath your pride to ask For him some little gain?</p> <p>His days are waning very fast, And he must soon be laid In the land “he b’longs to,” Gundagai; ‘Neath some gum-trees wild, weird shade.</p> <p>You love to laud and honor Every act that is noble and true; And to Yarri, who saved so many lives, Surely some little is due.</p> <p>O Christians! help him, our brother, Dark-skinned though he be; He is one of “God's own creatures,” Hearing the “boundless sea.”</p> <p>Soon the burden of living Will by him be laid aside; Help him to rest in the land he loves, By the Murrumbidgee’s tide.”</p> |
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⁵³ Gundagai Times. 27th April 1880, p4.

Another poem, in a similar vein, appeared in the press, in July 1880. The author of this ode was William Beer.⁵⁴

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| <p>"GUNDAGAI IN 1852.</p> <p>Dear Bob, and so you want to have A little information About this far-famed Gundagai! Then hear you my relation.</p> <p>In fifty-two the people lived Quite happily together; At least I should imagine so, Except 'twas in bad weather.</p> <p>And then, alas! as now occurs In many, many places, They might perhaps have had the blues, And spoil their pretty faces.</p> <p>But this aside. The people dwelt In houses by the river; The Murrumbidgee's stream swept on, And on, it seemed, for ever.</p> <p>So calm; so placid - yet so grand And noble, one might wonder Its possibility at times To roll in awful thunder.</p> <p>And yet, when melts Kiandra's snow, And rain is fulling furious, You cannot doubt the river's forces Nor longer, Bob, be curious.</p> <p>But they all seemed in ignorance any evil looming, And so at eve's late hour retired, Nor dreamt of danger coming.</p> <p>But rains had fallen, snow had melted, Streams and creeklets hurrying; Down the Murrumbidgee thundered, Life and chattels burying.</p> <p>The date was twenty-fifth of June, Eighteen fifty-two, Bob; And eighty seven people were Drowned with no "adieu," Bob.</p> | <p>The town comprised two hundred souls, Who very soon were scattered; The watery grave received the dead; Alas! what hopes were shattered!</p> <p>Write on, my pen; unmoved my tongue; Record the fact in sorrow: I now am living, - who can tell My fate e'er comes to-morrow!</p> <p>And many that eventful night Slept calm as children ever, Until e'er morn the floods came down, Compelling friends to sever.</p> <p>Where are the brave, with boats and rafts, To save the helpless dying? Let hills resound the mournful tale; "O rescue!" they are crying.</p> <p>Two aborigines are at work, In small canoes they battle; But, though they try, they little do, For down go men and cattle.</p> <p>Old Yarry and Old Jacky fought Amidst the new-formed ocean; They risked their lives to save the whites, And there was great commotion.</p> <p>A hymn of praise, a song of thanks, Let all the saved ones render To these poor men: -- But one is dead; And Yarry will soon surrender.</p> | <p>For he, once King of all his tribe, Onward in years arriving, Is now infirm, and hopeless lies- No prospect of surviving.</p> <p>But there are some who owe to him There happy liberation; For with his little craft he proved To them from death salvation.</p> <p>He now in pain and anguish lies, But hopes to soon get brighter; His friends, I think, should rally round, And cheer and make him lighter.</p> <p>Dear Bob, I've told you but a part Concerning my narration, But kindly wait, and you shall have Some further information. For I have much to tell you yet, But think that I had better Reserve it for another time, And write another letter."</p> |
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⁵⁴ Gundagai Times. 23rd July 1880, p4.

In the 1930's Will Carter wrote a series of articles, mostly about Adelong and the surrounding districts. In May 1939 he wrote that King Yarrie [sic] was sometimes referred to as Jackie, creating more confusion on the matter.⁵⁵

In June 1925, WJB published the following poem in the local Gundagai press,⁵⁶

“The town of Gundagai first stood, Upon the flat so nice and green,
The scene was fair, the soil was good, The river and the creek between.
'Neath shady gums the children play, The black men shook their heads in doubt;
They said Baal, that one good to stay. When big one flood bin walk about.
But talk of floods could not avail, The boldest didn't care a darn;
For what they thought a fairy tale, Or just some ancient woman's yarn
At last one night a bushman came, He cooeed not nor sang a song;
The night was dark, his horse was lame, He'd raced him from Gobarralong.
Get up he yelled, I warn you fly, Go off from here to higher ground;
The water's coming mountain high, If you stay here you'll all be drowned.
The man is mad. then someone said, He's either mad, or drunk, or both;
And I for one go back to bed, I wouldn't believe him on his oath.
But morning brought remorse that kills, On every side the waters bar;
Oh Lord, if we could reach those hills, they are so near and yet so far.
One boat there was, the punt had gone, The boat was on the southern side;
But none there fit to take it on, The stream was strong and swift and wide.
Then came two swagmen (sailor men), Put down their swags and said we'll try;
We've rowed more boats than ere you'd ken, We'll rescue most of them or die.
Without mishap they reached the town, Where people on their houses sat;
They started on the lowest down, And those most easy to get at.
Take me, take me, I'll help to pull, Cried girls and children on the sheds;
The sailors filled the boat too full, Their hearts were softer than their beads.
Quite safe had they been on the sea, They had no chance that tide to stem;
Their boat was smashed against a tree; Brave men the last was seen of them.
Next came Australia's sable son, Wild Yarrie in his bark canoe;
The deeds he did were nobly done, As I will now relate to you.
That frail canoe the flood to span, Poor Imitation of a boat;
Said they it takes a clever man. To even keep that thing afloat.
But what's that shouting, listen, hark, The lookers on are cheering wild;
Bold Yarrie and his sheet of bark, Has saved a woman and her child.
Good boy, Yarrie, don't you shirk, Go fetch 'em, rescue all you can;
Poor Yarrie wasn't used to work, That flood would test the strongest man.
But on he went, and on again, A black man, but his heart was white;
Not once to cross that stream in vain, Till barred by darkness of the night.
Wild Yarrie and his craft were blest, Each time he struggled to the shore:
They say old Yarrie did his best, If so, the best could do no more.
Droughts and floods will ever be, The tale of Yarrie's bark canoe;
I tell as it was told to me, By one he saved in fifty-two.
Since then long years have come and gone, Where Yarrie sleeps is high and dry;
And floods still roll as they rolled on, Before the fall of Gundagai.

⁵⁵ Daily Advertiser. 8th May 1939, p3.

⁵⁶ Gundagai Times. 30th June 1925, p2.

Jackey [or Jacky, or Jackie]

Similar to the situation with Yarri, there were several Aboriginal men named Jackey.

Jackey [aka King of Burrowa]⁵⁷

It is believed that this Jackey inhabited a wide area, which included Yass and Gundagai. In 1879 a report noted that “*old Jackey and Kitty King,*” were in the vicinity of Yass, and recorded that their combined ages exceeded 140 years.⁵⁸ It was noted that neither of the couple had touched a drop of spirits for the past thirty years, both having taken the pledge.

Kitty King passed away on the 1st February 1883, at North Yass. She was described as the oldest female of the Yass tribe. She was estimated to be seventy five years old. Kitty was buried in the Catholic portion of the Yass cemetery.⁵⁹ Jackey had predeceased Kitty so his death must have occurred between May 1879 and February 1883.

Jackey [King of Tarrabanda]

This Jackey was referred to as the “*King of Tarrabanda,*” and he passed away on the 17th April 1874. His death was described as follows,⁶⁰

“Next day he died, while sitting and leaning against a tree, so quietly that some minutes elapsed before his sable compatriots discovered that he had passed away. He was afterwards interred according to aboriginal custom. Poor old Jackey; he will never again salute residents with the wonderfully affable smile he could assume, or state as if it were all one word that he ‘*blong-to-Gundagai,*’ or solicit grog, grub, sixpences, pipes, or tobacco.”

Jackey’s partner was known as Maria, and she passed away in October 1871, presumably at or near Gundagai.⁶¹

It was this Jackey who organised a corroboree at the Big Plain, near Gundagai in 1872. Some two hundred people from the Lachlan tribes were expected to attend the event.⁶²

⁵⁷ Riverine Grazier. 17th February 1883, p4.

⁵⁸ Albury Banner. 24th May 1879, p16.

⁵⁹ Southern Argus. 6th February 1883, p2.

⁶⁰ Gundagai Times. 25th April 1874, p2.

⁶¹ Gundagai Times. 14th October 1871, p2.

⁶² Gundagai Times. 27th April 1872, p2.

Jackey [aka Jackey Morley]

The Jackey that saved people during the '52 Flood was from Mr Andrews' Kimo Station.⁶³ According to one source Jackey Morley had been brought up by the Morley family at Gundagai. Jackey was a fine athlete who excelled in all athletic sports, especially boxing. The same source claimed Jackey rescued fourteen people. In later life Jackey lived at the Brungle Aboriginal Station, where he passed away on the 15th September 1908 at the age of ninety four [this statement of age is possibly incorrect]]. His body was buried at Wagra-go-billy, about eight miles from Gundagai.⁶⁴

According to one source, Jackey was born in 1836. His mother died in 1845, after being speared, and the young lad was raised by Joseph Dillon Morley. Jackey worked on farms around the district before moving to the Brungle Mission Station.⁶⁵ He was also an accomplished rider and rode many winners at Gundagai, up until the time his weight caused him to retire from jockeying.⁶⁶

Jackey had a strong connection to Mary Turnbull [nee Andrews] and it was this relationship that motivated him to rescue "*Missy Andrews*" and her family.⁶⁷ This connection stemmed from Mary's kindness towards Jackey and his lubra when Mary was a young girl living on *Kimo*.⁶⁸

A correspondent at Brungle provided the following comments, following Jackey's death,⁶⁹

"The oldest and best known aboriginal on the Brungle Station, Johnny Morley, died on the 15th ultimo, aged 72 years. His age, of course, may be doubted, as there is no reliable record of such. For myself, I think he was much older. The manager, in referring to his death in the monthly report, states that ' he saved several lives in the Gundagai flood in 1852,' and that he was a very encyclopaedia for any events, that occurred since his boyhood, and he was gifted with a rare memory. Had he been a white man his past record would probably have ensured for him an elaborate obituary notice in half the newspaper of the State, but being what he was, he has gone to his eternal rest, unwept, unhonored and unsung. Personally, I had a great regard for the old fellow, and I think it was reciprocated, for we never but he asked for a ' bob,' or to get him a more liberal supply of tobacco, or soft food from the Board, and he was seldom disappointed."

Jackey's death certificate records the cause of death as, "*Senile decay hastened by eating about seven pounds of meat in a few hours.*" His death took place on the 15th, and his medical attendant, HW Mason, last saw him on the 1st, so presumably the details about the consumption of meat came from another source. Jackey's body was buried on the 16th September.⁷⁰

⁶³ Muswellbrook Chronicle. 11th January 1927, p3. / Sydney Morning Herald. 3rd March 1855, p5.

⁶⁴ Evening News. 11th December 1926, p4. [LTE signed JHH]. / Gundagai Independent. 19th September 1908, p2.

⁶⁵ Interpretive Signage. Located adjacent to the Yarri Memorial at Gundagai.

⁶⁶ Gundagai Independent. 19th September 1908, p2.

⁶⁷ Albury Banner. 18th June 1915, p44.

⁶⁸ Muswellbrook Chronicle. 11th January 1927, p3.

⁶⁹ Gundagai Times. 13th October 1908, p2.

⁷⁰ NSW BDM's. Death registration # 11616.



Above: The replica breastplate of the one presented to Jackey. Courtesy Gundagai Historical Museum.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31st.—Before the Police Magistrate.
Messrs. RILEY, WEBB, and PHILLIPS were summoned for supplying liquor to **Johnny Morley**, the aboriginal who was sentenced to 48 hours' imprisonment on Tuesday for being drunk on the athletic sports ground on Easter Monday. As **Johnny** professed entire ignorance of the nature of an oath, or of the truths of the Christian religion the cases broke down, but his worship indulged in some very severe reflections on the conduct of publicans who supplied aborigines with liquor.

Left: Jackey Morley was possibly a victim of the pernicious substances introduced to indigenous Australians by the white colonists,⁷¹ although no other instances of such behaviour by Jackey were found.

⁷¹ Gundagai Times. 3rd April 1869, p2.



Above: Jackey Morley of Brungle Station. Courtesy Australian Museum, Sydney.
Hubbard Collection



Above: Photo of Aboriginal People at Brungle Station in 1906. Jackey [aka John Morley] is 2nd from the right. Courtesy Australian Museum Archives. [AMS459/10, The Exchange Studio].



Above: Photo of the Brungle Station in 1898. Courtesy Australian Museum Archives. [AMS459/4].

The efforts of Yarri and Jackey have been recognised with several monuments and other manmade structures.

In 1952 the Horsley family organised a sundial in honour of Yarri, which later stood in front of the Museum in Homer Street.

In 1983, on Australia Day, a memorial park on the flood plain was named in honour of Yarri.

On the 26th November 1984, the new bridge over Morley's Creek was named Yarri Bridge.⁷²

In September 1990, on National Aborigines' and Islanders' Day, the then Premier of NSW, Nick Greiner, unveiled a memorial headstone in honour of Yarri. Mr Greiner also unveiled a plaque near the Yarri Bridge, at the location believed to be the spot where Yarri brought those he rescued to shore. The headstone was erected by members of the Tumut-Brungle Aboriginal Land Council.⁷³



Above: The headstone erected in honour of Yarri, located at the entry to the Gundagai Monumental Cemetery.

⁷² Allen Crooks. *Yarri*.

⁷³ Daily Advertiser. 8th September 1990.



Left: The plaque that marks the spot where Yarri debarked those he saved in the '52 flood.



Above: The stone in which the plaque is set.

In more contemporary times the Yarri monument was erected in Sheridan Street, featuring both Yarri and Jackey.



Above: The Sheridan Street memorial dedicated to Yarri and Jackey.

Who Rescued Who?

In 1852 a correspondent reported,

*“Two strangers manned a boat, and took several from the trees, myself amongst the number. The black fellow “Jackey,” belonging to Mr. Andrews, afforded in this respect the most valuable assistance, saving a great many lives.”*⁷⁴

The actions of Jacky would have been extremely risky, and heroic, given the amount of debris (logs etc.) floating down the river.

Crooks deduced that Yarri had saved 49 people, and credited Jackey with, *“a number of rescues.”*⁷⁵

According to Henry Turnbull [junior], *“Yarri, did good work and saved several lives by swimming out to them and helping them ashore.”*⁷⁶

It should be noted that Henry was not even born at the time of the 1852 flood, so his recollections are all hearsay.

⁷⁴ Sydney Morning Herald. 5th July 1852, p2.

⁷⁵ Allen Crooks. Yarri.

⁷⁶ Muswellbrook Chronicle. 11th January 1927, p3.

The accounts of the 1852 flood are almost always sullied by erroneous assertions as to how many people were saved by Yarri and Jackey. Poor old Tommy Davis doesn't get a mention anywhere. Sources such as the following perpetuated the fallacies,

1927, February - Stated that Yarri saved one hundred lives.⁷⁷

1937, April – Stated that Yarri saved one hundred lives.⁷⁸

Sources found by the author record ten lives saved by Yarri and nineteen saved by Jackey. Three other people were said to have been saved by both men. A Mrs Morris was said to have been saved by Aboriginals, but the source did not identify the individuals responsible.

It is possible that Yarri and Jackey did help save more people than have been identified in this article, but figures of forty nine and a hundred are made without any basis of fact.

Those identified as being saved specifically by Aboriginal men, are as follow,

Rescued by Yarri,

1. Ellen Doyle [42]⁷⁹
2. William Joseph Doyle [infant]⁸⁰
3. Mary Reardon [nee Murphy][45]⁸¹
4. Mary Reardon [13]⁸²
5. Peter Reardon [10]⁸³
6. Patrick Reardon [8]⁸⁴
7. Ellen Reardon [7]⁸⁵
8. Reardon, 5th child⁸⁶
9. John Spencer⁸⁷
10. William Weatherby [40]⁸⁸

Rescued by Jackey,

1. Robert Riley [43]⁸⁹
2. Johanna Riley [nee Keihane] [34]⁹⁰
3. Mary Ann Riley [10]⁹¹
4. Susan Mary Riley [9]⁹²
5. Catherine Mary Riley [6]⁹³

⁷⁷ Richmond River Herald. 25th February 1927, p7.

⁷⁸ Cootamundra Herald. 30th April 1937, p7.

⁷⁹ Gundagai Independent. 16th September 1899, p2.

⁸⁰ Gundagai Independent. 16th September 1899, p2.

⁸¹ Gundagai Times. 18th May 1915, p2. See Watermen of Gundagai. p108.

⁸² Gundagai Times. 18th May 1915, p2.

⁸³ Gundagai Times. 18th May 1915, p2.

⁸⁴ Gundagai Times. 18th May 1915, p2.

⁸⁵ Gundagai Times. 18th May 1915, p2.

⁸⁶ Gundagai Times. 18th May 1915, p2.

⁸⁷ Goulburn Herald. 17th July 1852, p6. / Empire. 15th July 1852, p3.

⁸⁸ Gundagai Independent. 9th February 1925, p2.

⁸⁹ Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44. / NSW BDM's. Birth registration # 817/1850 V1850817 67.

⁹⁰ Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44.

⁹¹ Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44.

⁹² Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44.

⁹³ Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44.

6. Robert Thomas Riley [2]⁹⁴
7. Ellen Mary Riley [2 weeks]⁹⁵
8. Mary Brown⁹⁶
9. Brown child⁹⁷
10. Darby the Riley's groom⁹⁸
11. John the Riley's cook⁹⁹
12. Henry Thatcher¹⁰⁰
13. Henry Mathew Stacey Turnbull [25]¹⁰¹
14. Mrs Mary Turnbull [25]¹⁰²
15. Stacy Isaac Turnbull [2]¹⁰³ Two of the children names were Stacy and Edwin, according to Harry Turnbull.¹⁰⁴
16. Edwin Flavene Llewellyn Turnbull [8 days]¹⁰⁵
17. Helen or Emma Sawyer.¹⁰⁶ Helen Sawyer, according to Harry Turnbull.¹⁰⁷
18. George Gallogly [6]¹⁰⁸ Child of Mary Turnbull [nee Andrews] from previous marriage.
19. Tom Gallogly [4]¹⁰⁹ Child of Mary Turnbull [nee Andrews] from previous marriage.

Rescued by Tommy,

1. William Foster

Rescued by Yarri and Jackie,

1. David Smith¹¹⁰
2. Charles Sydney Smith [16]¹¹¹
3. Archie Smith¹¹²

Rescued by Aboriginal men,

1. Mrs Morris¹¹³

Recorded rescues total = thirty four people.

⁹⁴ Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44.

⁹⁵ Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44.

⁹⁶ Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44.

⁹⁷ Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44.

⁹⁸ Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44.

⁹⁹ Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44.

¹⁰⁰ Albury Banner. 28th May 1915, p44. / Goulburn Herald. 17th July 1852, p6.

¹⁰¹ Muswellbrook Chronicle. 11th January 1927, p3. See also Albury Banner. 18th June 1915, p44.

¹⁰² Muswellbrook Chronicle. 11th January 1927, p3.

¹⁰³ Muswellbrook Chronicle. 11th January 1927, p3.

¹⁰⁴ Albury Banner. 18th June 1915, p44.

¹⁰⁵ Muswellbrook Chronicle. 11th January 1927, p3.

¹⁰⁶ Muswellbrook Chronicle. 11th January 1927, p3.

¹⁰⁷ Albury Banner. 18th June 1915, p44.

¹⁰⁸ Albury Banner. 18th June 1915, p44.

¹⁰⁹ Albury Banner. 18th June 1915, p44.

¹¹⁰ Sydney Morning Herald. 26th July 1852, p2.

¹¹¹ Gundagai Independent. 14th November 1929, p2.

¹¹² Gundagai Independent. 14th November 1929, p2.

¹¹³ Empire. 5th July 1852, p2.