

“BUNYAH JIMMY” (King of the Hastings River)

He died in 1905 and was reputed to be over 100 years old when it happened but no one person could be absolutely sure. They said his wife Mary, who predeceased him in the 18th December 1898, was 90 years of age. The King and his wife were buried in the Black's Cemetery located west of the old Wauchope Rifle Range site and towards the Oxely Highway now being encompassed by modern housing development.

The name of “Bunyah-Jimmy” was ascribed to him because of his fondness for the taste of the Acorn seed which was highly prized by the Aboriginals of this area. The fleshy tip could be eaten raw when unripe, but when it ripened they were roasted in the fire and eaten after the scorching. Ironically, the Bunyah trees of Australia have remained the only known hereditary property of the Aboriginal People.

“Bunyah-Jimmy had an enemy. His name was “Darby” and they were opposed to one another all their living lives. “Bunyah” was a full-blood native aristocrat and has been described as an imposing figure of large physical stature. He carried a scar and lump on his shoulder that testified to a spear wound caused by “Darby” in their younger days. “Darby” was jealous of his standing and hated him more because of his title as King but was never able to displace him even after his death.

A youthful School teacher, Jacob Borger, living and teaching at Beechwood, befriended “Bunyah” in his aging years and both he and the King were destined to die, within a month of each other, in 1905. Borger was only 20 years of age and his death was caused from Septiceama with an infection caused by the Stinking Rodger Bush. He was born in Kempsey and is buried in the Beechwood Cemetery. His contribution to history lies in the composition and the translation of a poem from “Bunyah” out of the tribal language to the white man's tongue and it does record posterity a valuable part of the “Koree-Koree” people who occupied this valley for thousands of years prior to the appearance of the pale-skinned Northmen with their coloured eyes and strange and different ways.

“Bunyah” met his death when accidentally hit by a moving horse and cart as he moved in front of it. He was hurt badly but disappeared in the darkness of the bush and could not be found for two days when he was dead lying under a tree. He buried his personal valueables and “Mundy” stones but kept the brass plaque which was encribed with the title “Bunyah-Jimmy. King of the Hastings River”, complete with neck chain. It was stated that every time he slept, he removed it and wrapped it in cloth so that the Sun, the Wind and the Moon would not melt it? It was his belief that this could happen. His actual Tribal name was unknown and the brass plaque was a personal gift from the “Letterewe” Bains where he spent some of his life and influenced tribal behaviour on the Hastings River. The Crescent

shaped plaque and chain was made on the farm's forge and later presented to the Hastings Shire Council on his death. Later it was said that a visiting American valued it, so it was sold to him.

We leave it for the reader to assess for themselves to interpretation of the poem by Jacob Borger as first published in 1905.

“Goonah, Goonbora. Min-Ana-Watter”

Beautiful Isle of Koree,
Once the Black Man's Glory.
Where oft the wild yell sounded
As the wild Koree bounded
In the mazy mystic circle
Of their wild Corroboree.

By wooded hills surrounded
And by the Hastings waters bounded,
To where the floods came roaring
With it's muddy waters pouring,
O'er the worn rocks that guard
Ole “Euka-Buneebar's ford.

And the old familiar place
Is still revered by Koree race,
Fore oft the tale goes round,
How, on old “Kaparra” ground
Just where the “Iron Gang” had cleared.
A soldier, tall, was speared
To grace the Koree feast.

And of his flavour still they boast
But then as he began to roast
His Cartridge Box exploded.
And the madness, they were goaded,
As from the fire came tumbling
That body in their midst

“Goonah, Goomboora. Min-Ana-Watter”
“A Ghost. A Ghost. Oh- Let us scatter.”
And away the Koree ran.
Until at last they all came back.
Then their lips began to smack,
Roast Soldier was so good,
“Mahrook”...Like Pork.

But alas, the Koree's glory ended,
When the woodsman's axe descended
And laid their forest low.
Now the ancient home of Koree,
Is the Scotsman's home of glory
So beautiful to see.
Where once the Earth so dense
With it's tall trees immense
Spread shade and fragrance rare.
And now the wide green fields
With their rich harvest yeilds,
To glad the hearts of all.

And in the homes around
Is a hearty welcome found
For all who visit there.
And as the dusk fades and dies
Oft sometimes is heard to rise
Their song of thankful praise.

Contributed by R. P. Marchmont
with Acknowledgement to the records of
Mrs. Hazel Suters.