

BUNGARIM (1800 - 1848)

Bungarim was Ngurungaeta of the Marin-Balluk clan and a custodian of the Mt Macedon quarry. He had four wives and at least one son, Marmbul; little is known about them.

Bungarim was also known as Kone-nul-ler-gil and spellings of his names include Koungnallajil, Bunggureen, Bunguren, Bunggerin, Bungiring, Bungirey, and Bungarie.

Bungarim was a leader of the Marin-Bulluk clan of the Woiwurrung, who were also known as the Boiberit or the Boi-berit-thun-willam segment of the Wurundjeri based at Mt Macedon.¹ Clan Leaders or Head Men during and after the time of the British arrival included Ningulabul, Bungarim, Billibillery, Wonga, and Barak, and most of these were related to each other. Bungarim's authority descended from Billibillary – according to William Barak “beside Billibillary was Bungarim, and Billibillary made Bungarim ngurungaeta”.

The name Marin-Balluk (or Marin-Bulluk, Marin-Balug) means “People of the Big Water” who were occupying land between the Jacksons Creek and Maribyrnong River west to Kororoit Creek, and from Sunbury in the north to Maidstone and Williamstown in the south, but did not extend to Port Phillip Bay. They were part of the Woiwurrung language group, who along with the Djadjawurrung, Wathawurrung, Boonwurrung, and Daungwurrung, had a shared cultural affinity in the bigger group known as the Kulin nation. The Marin-Balluk men had nose perforations and their hair was plaited with red ochre.² At the time of the British occupation in the 1830s, it was estimated that the Marin-Balluk clan comprised between 100 and 150 members, but this may be an underestimate.

Bungarim is usually acknowledged as the custodian of the Mt Macedon (Mt William) quarry where stone axe heads were made and traded with neighbouring clans and even into New South Wales and South Australia. In the 1840s the Mt William quarry was managed by old Ningulabul and his sons and Murrum Murrumbean, plus Bungarim, Billibellary and Bebejan, who were the sons of ‘heireses in quarry rights’ identified as ‘sisters’ of old Ningulabul.³ When Billibellary was the custodian, he alone was permitted to live at the quarry and work its outcrops, and Bungarim took over when he was away.⁴

William Barak once commented on the relationship between a ngurungaeta and his offsider, an aide, a spokesperson, possibly a deputy, even perhaps a ngurungaeta in training: “*Beside each of the ngurungaeta there was the man to whom he gave ‘his words’. Beside Captain Turnbull was my father’s brother Jack Worthery. Beside my father his uncle Winberi. Beside Billibillary was Bungarim.*”⁵ Billibillary and Bungarim were a duo who worked together. For example, when neighbouring clans wanted to obtain stone, they had to follow strict rules, and anyone caught trying to take stone without permission had to be chastised diplomatically:

*“At the meeting the Wudthaurung sat in one place, and the Wurrunjeri in another, but within speaking distance. The old men of each side sat together, with the younger men behind them, Billi-billeri had behind him Bungerim, to whom he ‘gave his word’. The latter then standing up said, “Did some of you send this young man to take tomahawk stone?” The Headman of the Wudthaurung replied, “No, we sent no one.” Then Billi-billeri said to Bungerim, “Say to the old men that they must tell that young man not to do so any more. When the people speak of wanting stone, the old men must send us notice.” Bungerim repeated in a loud tone and the old men of the Wudthaurung replied, “That is all right, we will do so.” Then they spoke strongly to the young man who had stolen the stone, and both parties were again friendly with each other.”*⁶

There were smaller quarries located along the rivers valleys and 11 have been found along the Maribyrnong River with a hard stone called silcrete that was used for making small flaked-stone tools, such as spear heads and scrapers. One of these historic quarries is located on the riverbank opposite the former James McIntyre ‘Riversdale’ farm, south of the E. J. Whitten Bridge, and is included as part of Brimbank Park Quarry. Myer Eidelson has written about it:

“Silcrete rocks scattered on a hillside south of Brimbank Park, Keilor, show marks resulting from Aboriginal stone manufacture. Aboriginal camping places were often located near a source of stone like silcrete from

¹ Howitt 1904: 340–341

¹ Barwick

² The Age 14 August 2010 p16

³ Barwick p121

⁴ Howitt 1904, 312

⁵ Quoted in Rebellion at Corranderk.pdf p9

⁶ Howitt 1904: 340–341

which utensils for everyday living were made, or men might travel specifically to a quarry site if the raw materials did not occur naturally in the surrounding area. Flaked tools could be made quickly and were used for everyday tasks such as shaping objects made of wood, bark and stone. They were used as spear tips and barbs in hunting weapons and as knives to butcher game. They were also used to scrape animal skins for cloaks, containers and decorative items.”⁷

The land around Brimbank was the Marin-Bulluk’s summer hunting grounds. The Maribyrnong River supplied fresh water and fish and the riverbanks grew cultivated plants such as the staple murnong daisy. The men hunted through the rivers, trees and plains, the women and children harvested plants, fruits and seeds. They lived on wattle-seed damper, aquatic plants, fish, eels, waterbirds, kangaroo, possum and yam daisy tubers. They built stone fish traps across the creeks and rivers that became natural crossing points. They knew when the eel runs were due and would gather for a feast; at times of plenty they would invite neighbours to the party.



According to a 2010 Indigenous heritage study of Melbourne, the Maribyrnong catchment area has some of the oldest and richest evidence of Aboriginal habitation and some 25 Aboriginal places have been identified in Brimbank Park.⁸ Footscray was a common meeting place of the Marin-balluk, Yalukit-willam and the Wurundjeri people; remnants of several earth ovens have been found near Grimes Reserve, which indicate it was a regular stopover.

Alfred Solomon, who was a young boy in the 1840s, would later record his memories with some nostalgia about friendly interactions with the local clan near the old Braybrook village reserve. Quotes from his unique commentary are often used in local history because no one else of his era has published such first-hand observations:

“They appeared to be always on the move from one part of their tribal territory to another in search of food. He has witnessed the Corroboree and others of their customs, and was, when a boy, very much in touch with the tribe. He has often seen a blackfellow stand in the river and display his quickness of eye and sureness of stroke by striking fish with his spear, as they swam around him. The river teemed with fish in the season, and like the swamp - which then existed near the site of Maidstone - was covered with wildfowl. Though not in very large numbers, plover, quail, snipe, native companions, turkeys, and occasionally a flock of emus were found on the plains. Cockatoos, parrots, and pigeons, with many kinds of smaller birds lived in the trees and scrub. At night the weird cry of the curlew could be heard. The river valley was the haunt of the kingfisher, and there merry companies of laughing Jackasses loudly announced the approach of morn and evening. Hawks, owls, and other birds of prey played their part in the order of nature, visited the settler’s flocks, and carried off the lambs. Now and then a few kangaroos were to be

⁷ Meyer Eidelson, *The Melbourne Dreaming, A Guide to the Aboriginal Places of Melbourne* p68.

⁸ *The Age* 14 August 2010 p16

*met, and the dingo and half-breed dogs were very destructive at first. Reptiles and snakes in particular were numerous, the black and tiger species especially so. The fences made of titree and brushwood, which one may look vainly for now, provided shelter for reptiles, and snakes swarmed in the land along the river banks and watercourses. At Hampstead, where there is now no sign of trees, there was a grove of timber about a square mile in extent, where sheoaks, gums, and blackwood flourished and provided cover for the opossum and native bear, but when the diggings opened this spot became a favourite camping ground for teams travelling by way of Raleigh's punt, and the grove was soon destroyed."*⁹

The river became noxious within a decade once the British colonisers went industrial. Raleigh's boiling down works was established on the Maribyrnong in the mid-1840s – it was one of the offensive trades that was established along the river and led to the pollution of the water, making it unsuitable for human consumption. More industries were to come, such as the wool scouring and meat byproducts factories. Even when the pollution started further downstream, it drifted with the tides upstream to the several shallows at Braybrook, and the once idyllic native campsites at Hampstead were no more. Occasionally there were reports of thousands of dead fish floating on the surface. One estimate is that in the early 1870s nearly 2.5 million litres of blood flowed into the Maribyrnong from these works.¹⁰

In the 1830s, when the British colonists from Tasmania started arriving in larger numbers in Port Phillip (Victoria), the local population responded as best they could, and Bungarim was one of the leaders. He was a signatory to John Batman's treaty of 1835 with the Port Phillip Aborigines, which was disallowed by the British Government, and which provided no real compensation or security to the locals. Conflicts with the Aboriginal population increased as the number of colonists increased. In the late 1830s there was talk of establishing a Native Police Corps, ostensibly to protect but also to control the clans who congregated in and around Melbourne – their usual domain – but before long the clans were forbidden from staying overnight in Melbourne.

Several clan leaders, including Bungarim, were recruited into the Native Police Corps which was officially formed in 1842. They operated under the command of Henry Dana and the scheme was overseen by the Assistant Protector of Aborigines, Rev. William Thomas. Bungarim worked closely with Thomas around several localities, but growing health problems may have stifled his ambitions. As Thomas worked with the Aboriginal community he recorded his interactions with and assessment of the leaders, which were not always complimentary, at one stage acknowledging Bungarim as a chief, but also dismissively as a "harmless, quiet old man".¹¹

In 1844 Thomas noted that many natives were suffering from violent colds, including "the chief Bungereing", to whom he gave a good purging dose and made a great fuss.¹² Billibellary's wife Lunernmingim was at the encampment on the Merri Creek (Northcote) and Thomas referred to her as Old Millie: "She was but 42 years of age, her decrepitude a mark of the misery and disease brought by colonisation. ... Billbellarry's own kin was soon joined there by the senior Wurundjeri Woiwurrung man Bungereing and his kinfolk."¹³

When Ninggolobbin¹⁴ was on trial in 1845 for the murder of Booby, Bungarim and his Mt Macedon clan of men, women and children together with other Kulin clans began to assemble in Melbourne to show support for their leader. Billibellary and some men and women attended the trial directly.

About 1846 Bungarim and his family were at the Merri Creek with Billibellary who was in poor health. In fact many of the Melbourne Aborigines were now in poor health and Thomas noted that "with the population of all clans in freefall, as old and young died at an unprecedented rate and with food increasingly scarce."¹⁵ Stephens states that this might have been when Billibellary passed the senior leadership to the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung clans to Bungarim. William Barak, Billibellary's nephew and the best known of the Kulin leaders in the late colonial period, later told Alfred Howitt that "Bill Bilary made Bungereing ngurungaeta".¹⁶ Billibellary died later in the year at age 47 years.

Bungarim died a couple of years after Billibellary, in 1848 at age 48 years. His passing was recorded by protector William Thomas:

⁹ Footscray Independent 5 December 1908 p3

¹⁰ Wurundjeri Willam Book.pdf

¹¹ Stephens & Stewart-Muir p323

¹² Stephens & Stewart-Muir p310

¹³ Stephens & Stewart-Muir p319

¹⁴ Ninggolobbin (1771-1851) was Ngurungaeta (head) of the Gunung-william-balluk clan of the Woiwurrung tribe.

¹⁵ Stephens & Stewart-Muir p361

¹⁶ Stephens & Stewart-Muir p370

*"Among those at Tromgin (Botanic Gardens) were 'six bad with bubrun' (a kind of leprosy), three otherwise ill, and 'King Bungereing' so ill that the Kulin doctors were concerned for his life. Thomas administered potions to him, but the people preferred him to be treated by their own doctors. Alarmed lest his impending death reignite another spate of revenge killings, Thomas 'lectured the blacks on their old superstitious notions' of murder inflicted by sorcery and on white law. When Bungereing began to spit blood, Thomas brought the gig to take him to hospital, but he refused to go. Instead, the black doctors operated on Bungereing. On 9th March 1848 he died and was hurriedly buried to avoid any interference with his body."*¹⁷

The severity of the grief to his family and the sad aftermath was also noted:

*"Bun-ger-ring, an old Mount Macedon black, of a great family, of whose exploits he would often speak, had four wives. One day he came to the encampment accompanied by the youngest of his wives, and both Bun-ger-ring, and this woman was sick and feeble. They had called cold, and were suffering from low fever. Mr Thomas got medical aid and the young woman recovered but old Bun-ger-ring died. At the funeral the young widow was inconsolable. She burnt and mutilated herself very much. She mourned Bun-ger-ring's death for many days, refused food, and sat daily and nightly moaning plaintively. She stated boldly that she would starve herself to death and follow Bun-ger-ring. And sixteen days after his death she too, was buried."*¹⁸

Bungarim had shared custodianship of the Mount William quarry with his son Marmbul, who was born about 1822 and died in September 1848 at the young age of 26 years. Marmbul was also known as Marmbole, Marmvooll, and Tommy.

William Thomas reported that no Woiwurrung died at the hands of Europeans after 1839, but only 59 survived by 1852,¹⁹ so the number of Marin-Bulluk, a subclan of the Woiwurrung, would have been much lower.

In 2024, a proposal was made to name a small creek in Taylors Lakes/Keilor Downs as "Bungarim Creek" in recognition of Bungarim's leadership of the local Marin-Balluk clan in the early 1800s.



¹⁷ Stephens & Stewart-Muir p400-401

¹⁸ Robert Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria with Notes Relating to the Habits of the Natives of Other Parts of Australia and Tasmania*. 1878 pp138-139. Smyth quotes Edward John Eyre in saying: "The custom among the Australians of putting dust or ashes on the head, of shaving the head, of clipping the beard, and of lacerating the body at death or in sign of mourning, appears very similar to the practices among the Israelites in the time of Moses." p105.

¹⁹ Maribyrnong Aboriginal Heritage Study, Report for City of Maribyrnong, 1999, p78