

Aboriginal Culture

The simple question “Who were the early Aboriginal people of the present-day City of Logan?” cannot produce a simple answer.

Before the arrival of Europeans, southeast Queensland was the home of Aboriginal people who lived in extended family groups. These groups, sometimes referred to as “clans”, formed part of larger communities of people who spoke the same language.

Each family group lived within its own territory. A number of permanent camps were established and the family group moved from camp to camp throughout the year as the season changed and new food sources became available. This movement was not aimless wandering but was a planned and logical response to the environment.

The Logan City area was at the intersection of two major language groups, the Yugambeh and the Jaggera. The area experienced the pressures of white settlement at a relatively early stage and today, the territorial boundaries for each language group are not known precisely. Any discussion of the original people who lived in Logan City is therefore a little confusing and must be qualified with the statement that our current knowledge is imperfect and open to debate.

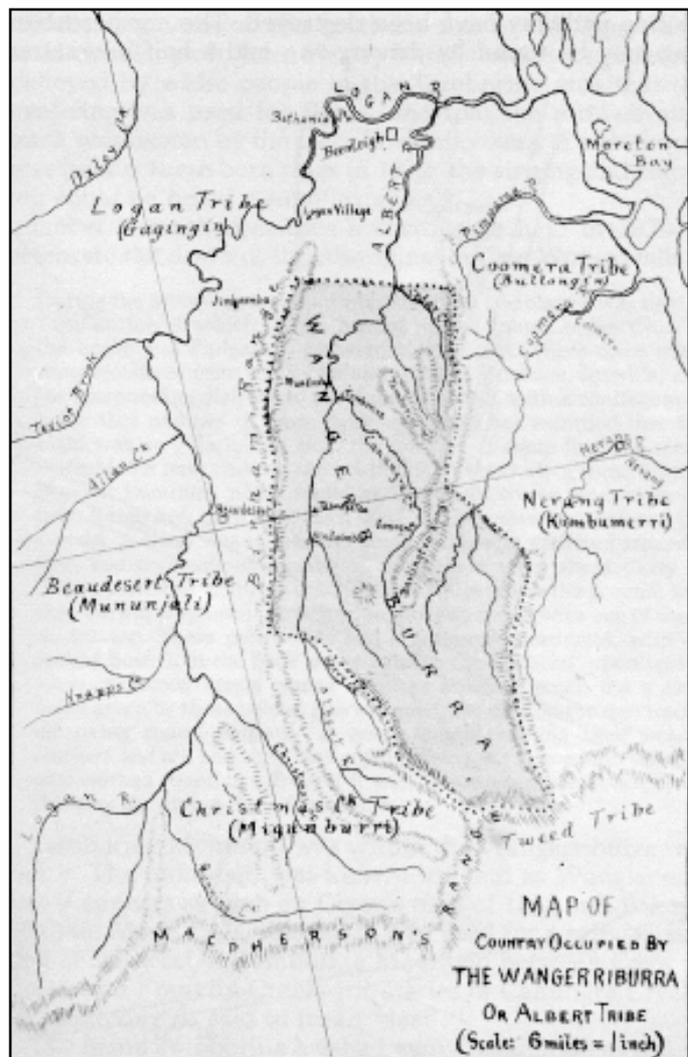
Gugingin Clan of the Yugambeh

To the south and east of the Logan river were the people who spoke the Yugambeh language. Their eastern border was the sea and the southern border was the Tweed River. Their territory seems to have extended partly beyond the Logan River, particularly in the Upper Logan near Tamrookum and Rathdowney, but the exact boundary is not clear.¹

Studies by their modern descendants² indicate that there were eight family groups within the Yugambeh. Of these, the one which lived closest to the present-day Logan City area was the Gugingin.

John Allen (Bullumm) of the neighbouring Wangerriburra clan said the Gugingin lived along the banks of the Logan in the Jimboomba area. A map drawn by John Lane shows the “Logan tribe (Gugingin)” slightly west of the Logan River around the Chambers Flat-Park Ridge area, possibly extending into Greenbank³

The Gugingin were expert makers of nets, using fine cone-shaped nets to trap fish and larger nets 15 metres wide to trap kangaroos. Like other families in the region, they moved throughout their territory according to the season. They had semi-permanent camps and



Map showing the area of the Gugingin (from the Report of the Chief Protector of Aborigines 1913)

Extract from the Journal of botanist Charles Fraser 1828

On the banks of the Logan and in the immediate vicinity of a native encampment, I noticed three sticks set upright in the ground, forming a triangle, and fastened together by a cord at the top, on which was placed a sheet of bark; and seeing something suspended under shelter of this bark, my curiosity induced me to point it out to Captain Logan, who informed me that it is customary for the tribes, when leaving a district, to deposit in such a situation their Kangaroo-Nets, Dillies, Bass mats, chissels, and superfluous implements until their return. It is considered the greatest breach of faith among these rude nations to touch any of the articles thus placed; a degree of honesty which, it is to be feared, we might look for in vain among their white neighbours.

On examining this depot, we found a Kangaroo-Net, 50 feet long and 5½ feet wide, formed of the most excellent twine, as fine as any fabricated in Europe, but much stronger, and woven in a manner that would do credit to a professed net maker; a fishing net of a beautifully fine mesh, and dyed black, forming when in the water, an inverted cone about 7 feet deep; a Dilly or luggage bag, such as the females carry, made of the leaves of a species of Xanthorrhaea and strong enough to bear any weight; two Eillmans or shields of the wood of Urtica Gigas or the Tree Nettle, as light as cork; two chissels edged with flint; and an iron wedge, evidently stolen from Brisbane Town.

sometimes left their excess equipment behind in a small shelter made like a tripod covered with bark. It was a point of honour that no-one ever stole the belongings left in this way.⁴

Ugarapul/Yaggapal , Yerongpan and Turrbal clans of the Jaggera

The Ugarapul people are part of the Jaggera language group. They lived to the west of Logan, around Fassifern and Ipswich but the position of their eastern boundary is not clear and may have extended into Logan City.⁵

Tom Petrie frequently used the term “Logan tribe” in his reminiscences and when speaking about the groups who were invited to the bunya festival, he explained that “the Logan tribe” was Yaggapal.

There is an uncertainty about the use of the terms Ugarapul and Yaggapal which has yet to be resolved. Some reports indicate that Ugarapul and Yaggapal are simply alternative spellings while others list them as distinct groups.⁶

Another name has also been mentioned in relation to the Logan area. Both Archibald Meston and Dr Joseph Lauterer referred to a group known as the Yerongpan who inhabited the sandy country from Oxley Creek to Brown’s Plains.⁷ On his journey of exploration in 1828, Charles Fraser mentioned several large Aboriginal camps in this area, their “huts” or shelters being of a different shape to those he had seen elsewhere. Fraser unfortunately did not go on to describe these unusual huts.

The Turrbal people lived in the Brisbane area. Tom Petrie stated that the Turrbal dialect was spoken “as far inland as Gold Creek or Moggill, as far north as North Pine and south to the Logan”.

Travel and Interaction between family groups

In adding up this slightly confusing information, it should be remembered that there was also a considerable amount of interaction between these different groups. Families often visited each other in an informal way, while at intervals, ceremonial gatherings were held involving many clans and hundreds of people. At the ceremonial gatherings, marriages were arranged, inter-family disputes were settled, goods were traded and religious ceremonies took place.

Modern descendants have documented the oral information of previous generations describing these interactions.⁸ Early white records also mention social life and travel.

In 1828, the explorers Logan, Cunningham and Fraser reported finding a pathway cut through thick brush on the Birnam Range, south of Logan City, part of a well-trodden Aboriginal route through the region.⁹

Tom Petrie came to Brisbane in the 1830s as a child and became friends with many Aboriginal people. As a rare privilege, he was taken with them to one of the large gatherings for the bunya nut harvest in the Bunya Mountains. Petrie said that when the bunya crop was ready, invitations would be issued – perhaps the Bribie Island people would be invited first, and they in turn would invite the Turrbal people of Brisbane, who would invite the people of the Logan whom he described as Yaggapal.

Tom Petrie was about 15 at the time and travelled with a group of 100 Turrbal people. The total number gathered at the Bunya Mountains was 600-700. After the bunya feast, inland families were often invited to the coast where they enjoyed a change of diet.

Petrie also mentioned an occasion when 700 Aboriginal people gathered in Brisbane to watch a new corroboree by the Ipswich people. The people from the Logan, Brisbane and Stradbroke Island camped on the hill above Roma St Station. The northern people - from Bribie, Mooloola, Noosa, Kilcoy and Baranbah - camped on the site of the present Normanby Hotel, while the people from Ipswich, Rosewood and Wivenhoe camped on Petrie Terrace.

After the corroboree, a ritualised battle took place between the northern people and those of the other areas. At first, the Brisbane group was stronger and drove back the others until two people were wounded with spears. Friends of the wounded people then called out “tor” which meant hit or wounded. The battle stopped while everyone rested and the wounded people were cared for. Then the fight resumed and Petrie recalled:

“Two men from one side got up and rushed in a threatening manner across to the others...As the spears and waddies flew here and there, (Tom Petrie) was amazed to see how they were dodged. Looking on, he felt it was impossible for a man to escape being hit, and yet most of the weapons passed between legs or over heads or were turned aside on a shield.”

The battle continued for days, but there were breaks in between so people could go hunting for food. The Logan people crossed the river in canoes or by swimming and hunted at West End where there used to be a large patch of scrub on the bend of the river.

When the people returned from hunting, a great feast was held, then the men painted and decorated themselves again and the battle continued.¹⁰

Early Interaction

Although hostile incidents between Aboriginal people and white settlers occurred in the wider Logan region, none were recorded in the area which became Logan City. Very little information of any type has been recorded by white settlers relating to this specific area, and there appear to be no recollections by Aboriginal people.

A comment by Stephen Simpson in 1849 suggests that the Logan people were already changing some traditional patterns in response to white settlement. In his capacity as Commissioner for Crown Lands, Simpson recommended that a reserve be set up on the Bremer River near Ipswich because Aborigines of the Brisbane and Logan Rivers were congregating there in great numbers. A boiling-down works had been set up to produce tallow from animal carcasses, and this made it easy for the Aboriginal people to obtain food.¹¹

Within the Logan City area, Thomas Hanlon recorded in the 1860s that settlers were always glad to see the Aboriginal people because they were able to exchange flour, sugar and tobacco for fish, kangaroo tails, crabs and honey.

Logan City still has many descendants of early settlers who passed down family stories. These usually indicate a friendly relationship. They are simple and fragmentary stories which give only a small glimpse of Aboriginal life at this time.

Kate Roche told descendants that when their family had first settled at what is now Rochedale in the 1860s and 70s, the Aboriginal people had been very helpful to them.¹²

The Shailers and Markwells recalled that from the 1860s onwards, both families were on familiar and friendly terms with local Aborigines, watching with interest as they threw spears or collected honey.¹³ On one occasion in 1866, the men of the family attended a corroboree held near the mouth of Slack's Creek. The incident was remembered because two of the young girls, Kate Shailer and Mary Ann Markwell, dressed in men's clothes and sneaked out to attend.

Sally Dennis recalled a time in the late 1880s when a group of Aborigines arrived at Daisy Hill, saying that they were hungry. When the Dennis family gave them sweet potatoes, they immediately made a fire and roasted them. The Dennis family said the group spoke very little, ate the potatoes and left.

When Glen Shailer's father was nine years old in 1893, an Aboriginal girl died. Her family asked to borrow a cart because they wanted to give the child a funeral. Mr Shailer agreed, as long as the cart was returned. The Aboriginal people took the cart, returned it soon afterwards and went away, never to be seen again



The Dennis family in the 1890s (Source: John Oxley Library Neg 72564)

When the Murray family arrived in 1870, a spring on the property was a camping place for local Aboriginal people.¹⁴

Other early settlers recalled corroborees near a large fig tree close to the Morning Star Hotel at Waterford West, and that "the main camp was between Bethania and Holmview."¹⁵

There are sometimes indications that there was uncertainty in the relationship. Mary Ann Markwell was washing in a creek in the 1860s when a hunting party of six Aborigines arrived. Mary Ann recalled that she had been very frightened, but that the group simply went past.

Deebing Creek Mission

In 1892, an Aboriginal mission was set up at Deebing Creek near Ipswich. It was managed by a local committee with a Presbyterian minister Rev Peter Robertson as chairman. Rev E. Fuller was appointed as superintendent.

Residence at first was voluntary and Aboriginal residents were given a separate plot of land and encouraged but not forced to farm it. However residents had to obtain a pass to go into town. The settlement received a government subsidy but was largely self-supporting, raising money through farming and even through gate takings at cricket matches.

The mission was moved in 1914 to a site at Purga, 5km away. When the committee experienced trouble in funding the settlement, it was handed over to the Government and an industrial school was set up. The government asked the Salvation Army to take over in 1921 and the establishment closed in 1948.

Records of the Mission show that some residents came from the Logan area. In 1893, Rev Fuller reported that a young man “Johnny from the Logan” was one of the hardest working residents.¹⁶ Around 1903, people at Deebing Creek recorded as coming from the Logan included W. Brown, Ben, Edward, Ellen Foote from the Upper Logan and H. Treen. An Aboriginal man named Brown performed a corroboree at a concert in Ipswich Town Hall in 1895 to raise money for the Deebing Creek cricket team, but it is not certain if it was the W. Brown from the Logan.

Bilin Bilin

Another resident at Deebing Creek in the late 1890s was Bilin Bilin who was well-known and well-respected in the general Logan area. Born in the early 1800s, he became a leader of the Yugambah people about 1863.¹⁷

Bilin Bilin appears to have moved widely through the area as many people recalled meeting him, usually referring to him as “Jackey Jackey”. He spent time with Pastor Haussmann at Bethesda Mission near Beenleigh. Haussmann taught Bilin Bilin to read and write and said that he recognised him as an important man among his people.¹⁸

Bilin Bilin’s brother Mark was a good singer. In 1864, the settlers of Waterford were invited to a corroboree and Mark entertained their guests by singing an English song. Around 300 Aborigines from Pimpama, Coomera and Tambourine also attended the corroboree which was held in a paddock at Hinchcliffe’s property “Broomhill” - their usual camping place.

In 1875, Bilin Bilin was given a kingplate which stated that he was “King of the Logan and Pimpama”. In 1887, he was granted a free pass on the new railway to visit his married daughter at Beaudesert.

One settler F.W. Hinchcliffe recalled that Bilin Bilin and Minnippi (whose kingplate said “King of Tingalpa”) were returning from a visit to Brisbane but when they reached the north side of Waterford, Minnippi became ill. They both took shelter in a disused building which had been Eden’s hotel, but Minnippi died a few days later and Bilin Bilin buried him at night in an unknown location.

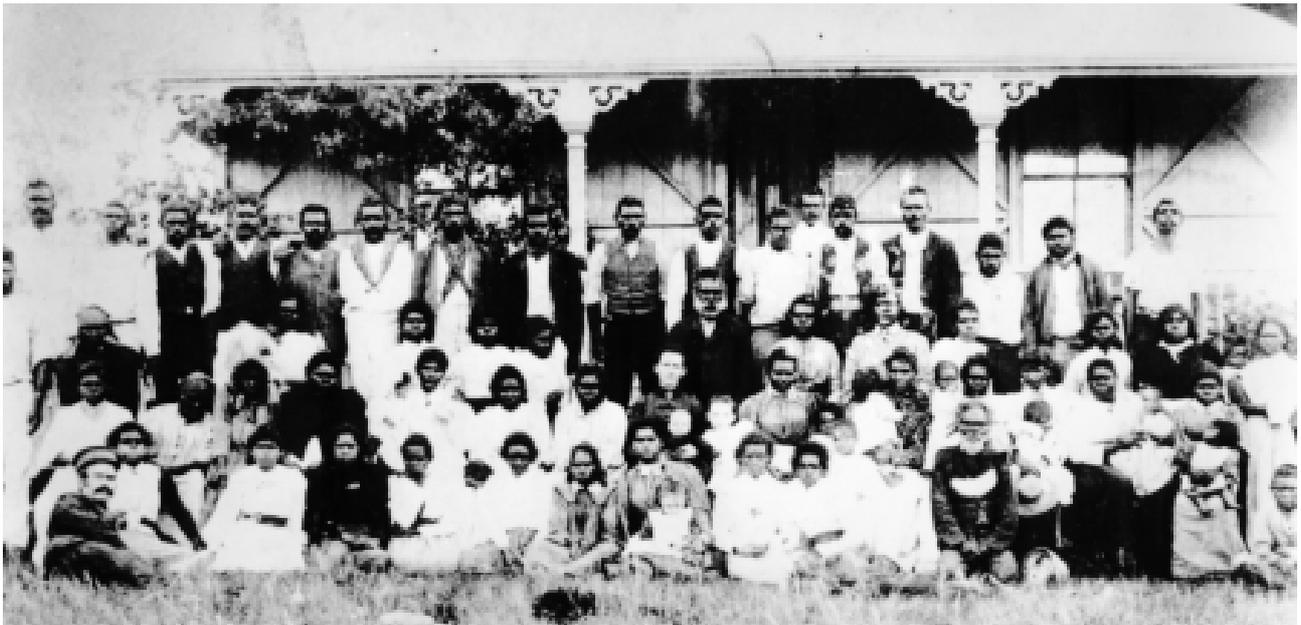


Bilin Bilin c1900 (Photographer probably Ben Taylor, photo courtesy Mrs A. Geertsma)

As Bilin Bilin grew older, the Chief Protector Archibald Meston pressured him to live in an Aboriginal reserve but he preferred to remain in the Logan area. Hinchclife said that Billy, “King of the Albert”, had told him that “he and Jacky were too old to travel about and ... Mr Meston had at last caught them to go to Deebing.” (sic) Photographs taken shortly before he died show Bilin Bilin at Deebing Creek, a long way from his own land but still wearing his kingplate.

Modern Logan

In the 1996 Census, 3180 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were recorded as living in Logan City. This represents 1.6% of the population and was lower than the Queensland average of 2.88%



Deebing Creek Mission in the 1890s. Bilin Bilin is in the front row.

References

¹ Thos W Hardcastle *Vocab of the Yugarabul Language* Qld Geog Journal 1946-7

Hardcastle commented that he had spoken to many Aboriginal people but “could never find the tribal boundary between the Yug-um-bir of the Maroon and Upper Logan and the Yug-ara-bul of the Teviot Valley

² Eg at Yugambah Museum, Language and Heritage Centre, Beenleigh

³ Map of the Wangerriburra Clan’s territory, J. Lane “Grammar Vocabulary and notes of the Wangerriburra tribe” from Report of Chief Protector of the Aborigines 1913

⁴ Cunningham and Fraser – Journals.

⁵ Personal conversations with Mr Neville Bonner 23.10.1998 and Mrs Mona Parsons 28.5.1998

⁶ For example, there are different definitions in Roger Ford and Thom Blake *Indigenous People of Southeast Queensland* FAIRA 1998 and in L. Clair Jackson *A Preliminary Sourcebook on the Ugarapul People of the Fassifern* 1992

⁷ “Quoted in J.G. Steele *Aboriginal Pathways* UQP 1983; also refer Lauterer “An Aboriginal Language” Qlder 21 March 1891

⁸ eg in Rory O’Connor *The Kombumerri* published by Rory O’Connor 1997

⁹ Cunningham’s Report to Governor Darling 16 Dec 1828

¹⁰Constance Campbell Petrie *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences* First published 1904, numerous subsequent editions.

¹¹ *Simpson Letterbook* 10.1.1849

¹² Quoted in J. Starr Logan *The Man The River and the City* 1988

¹³ Conversation with Glen Shailer 30.6.1999

¹⁴ J. Starr Logan *The Man The River and the City* 1988

¹⁵ *Waterford SS Centenary*

¹⁶ Qld State Archives COL/A736 93/6165

¹⁷ Information about Bilin Bilin from: Beaudesert Times article by F.W. Hinchcliffe "*Jacky Jacky King of the Logan and Pimpama*" 12.6.1931; and Rory O'Connor *The Kombumerri Aboriginal People of the Gold Coast* 1997

¹⁸ Quoted in Michael Aird *Portraits of our Elders* Qld Museum 1993