

= Yagan =

Yagan ( / ʔjeʔʔʔn / ; c . 1795 ? 11 July 1833 ) was an Indigenous Australian warrior from the Noongar people . He played a key part in early resistance to British settlement and rule in the area surrounding what is now Perth , Western Australia . Yagan was pursued by the local authorities after he killed a servant of Archibald Butler in an act of retaliation after Smedley , another servant of Butler , shot at a group of Noongar people taking potatoes and fowls , killing one of them . The government offered a bounty for Yagan 's capture , dead or alive , and a young settler , William Keats , subsequently shot and killed him . Yagan 's execution figures in Aboriginal folklore as a symbol of the unjust and sometimes brutal treatment of the indigenous peoples of Australia by colonial settlers . He is considered a hero by the Noongar .

After his shooting , settlers removed Yagan 's head to claim the bounty . Later , an official sent it to London , where it was exhibited as an " anthropological curiosity " and eventually given to a museum in Liverpool . It held the head in storage for more than a century before burying it with other remains in an unmarked grave in Liverpool in 1964 . Over the years , the Noongar asked for repatriation of the head , both for religious reasons and because of Yagan 's traditional stature . The burial site was identified in 1993 ; officials exhumed the head four years later and repatriated it to Australia . After years of debate within the Noongar community on the appropriate final resting place , Yagan 's head was buried in a traditional ceremony in the Swan Valley in July 2010 , 177 years after his death .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

A member of the Whadjuk Noongar people , Yagan belonged to a tribe of around 60 people whose name , according to Robert Lyon , was Beeliar . Scholars now believe that the Beeliar people may have been a family subgroup of a larger tribe whom Daisy Bates called Beelgar . According to Lyon , the Beeliar people occupied the land south of the Swan and Canning rivers , as far south as Mangles Bay . The group had customary land usage rights over a much larger area than this , extending north as far as Lake Monger and northeast to the Helena River . The group also had an unusual degree of freedom to move over their neighbours ' land , possibly due to kinship and marriage ties with neighbouring groups .

Yagan is thought to have been born around 1795 . His father was Midgegooroo , an elder of the Beeliar people ; his mother was presumably one of Midgegooroo 's two wives . Yagan was probably a Ballaroke in the Noongar classification .

= = Marriage and family = =

According to the historian Neville Green , Yagan had a wife and two children . A report in the Perth Gazette in 1833 gives the names of his children as " Naral " , age 9 , and " Willim " , age 11 ; however , most other sources state that the warrior was unmarried and childless . Described as taller than average with an impressive burly physique , Yagan had a distinctive tribal tattoo on his right shoulder , which identified him as " a man of high degree in tribal law . " He was generally acknowledged to be the most physically powerful of his tribe .

= = = Relations with settlers = = =

Yagan would have been about 35 years old in 1829 when British settlers landed in the area and established the Swan River Colony . For the first two years of the colony , relations between settlers and Noongar were generally amicable , as there was little competition for resources . The Noongar welcomed the white settlers as Djanga , the returned spirits of their dead . Historical reports noted

the two groups shared fish . As time passed , conflicts between the two cultures gradually became more frequent . The settlers incorrectly thought that the Noongar were nomads who had no claim to the land over which they roamed . Colonists fenced off land for grazing and farming according to their traditional practices of land use .

As the colonists fenced off more land , the Noongar were increasingly denied access to their traditional hunting grounds and sacred sites . In search of food , the Noongar raided the settlers ' crops and killed their cattle . They also developed a taste for the settlers ' supplies , and began to take flour and other food , which became a serious problem for the colony . In addition , the Noongar practice of firestick farming : firing the bush to flush out game and encourage germination of undergrowth for sustainability , threatened the settlers ' crops and houses .

In December 1831 Yagan and his father led the first significant Aboriginal resistance to white settlement in Western Australia . Thomas Smedley , a servant of farmer Archibald Butler , ambushed some natives who were raiding a potato patch , and killed one of Yagan 's family group . A few days later , Yagan , Midgegooroo and others stormed the farmhouse and , finding the door locked , began to break through the mud @-@ brick walls . Inside were Butler 's servant Erin Entwhistle and his two sons Enion and Ralph . After hiding his sons under the bed , Entwhistle opened the door to parley and was killed by Yagan and Midgegooroo . Noongar tribal law required that murders be avenged by the killing of a member of the murderer 's tribal group , not necessarily the murderer . The Noongar considered servants and employees to be part of the settlers ' groups . Historians believe the Noongar attack on Entwhistle was retribution under their tribal law . Not understanding tribal law ( and unlikely to agree with its concepts ) , the white settlers took the killing to be an unprovoked murder and dispatched a force to arrest Yagan 's group , without success .

In June 1832 Yagan led a party of Aborigines in attacking two labourers sowing a field of wheat alongside the Canning River near Kelmscott . One of the men , John Thomas , escaped , but the other , William Gaze , was wounded and later died as a result . The settlement declared Yagan an outlaw and offered a reward of £ 20 for his capture . He avoided capture until early October 1832 . A group of fishermen enticed Yagan and two companions into their boat , then pushed off into deep water . The fishermen took the three Noongar men to the Perth guardhouse , from which they were transferred to the Round House at Fremantle . Yagan was sentenced to death , but he was saved by the intercession of settler Robert Lyon . Arguing that Yagan was defending his land against invasion , Lyon said Yagan should not be considered a criminal but a prisoner of war and suggested he should be treated as such . At the recommendation of John Septimus Roe , the Surveyor @-@ General of Western Australia , Yagan and his men were exiled on Carnac Island under the supervision of Lyon and two soldiers .

Lyon thought he could teach Yagan British ways and convert him to Christianity . He hoped to gain his cooperation and use his tribal stature to persuade the Noongar to accept colonial authority . Lyon spent many hours with Yagan learning his language and customs . After a month , Yagan and his companions escaped by stealing an unattended dinghy and rowing to Woodman Point on the mainland . The Government did not pursue them ; apparently its officials considered they had been sufficiently punished .

In January 1833 two Noongar , Gyallipert and Manyat , visited Perth from King George Sound , where relations between settlers and natives were amicable . Two settlers , Richard [ Robert ? ] Dale and George Smythe , arranged for the men to meet a party of local Noongar to encourage friendly relations in the Swan River Colony . On 26 January Yagan led a group of ten formally armed Noongars in greeting the two men near Lake Monger . The men exchanged weapons and held a corroboree , though the groups did not appear to share a language . Yagan and Gyallipert competed at spear throwing . As an example of his prowess , Yagan struck a walking stick from a distance of 25 metres .

Gyallipert and Manyat remained in Perth for some time . On 3 March , Yagan obtained permission to hold another corroboree , this time in the Post Office garden in Perth . The Perth and King George Sound men met at dusk , chalked their bodies , and performed a number of dances including a kangaroo hunt dance . The Perth Gazette wrote that Yagan " was master of ceremonies and acquitted himself with infinite grace and dignity . "

During February and March , Yagan was involved in a series of minor conflicts with settlers . In February William Watson complained that Yagan had pushed open his door , demanded a gun , and taken handkerchiefs . Watson had to give him and his companions flour and bread . The following month , Yagan was among a group who received biscuits from a military contingent under Lieutenant Norcott ; when Norcott tried to restrict his supply , Yagan threatened him with his spear . Later that month , Yagan was with a group of Noongar who entered Watson 's house while he was away . The group left after Watson 's wife called on neighbours for help . The next day Captain Ellis lectured the Noongar about their behaviour . The frequent incidents prompted The Perth Gazette to remark on " the reckless daring of this desperado who sets his life at a pin 's fee ... For the most trivial offence ... he would take the life of any man who provoked him . He is at the head and front of any mischief . "

= = = Wanted dead or alive = = =

On the night of 29 April , a party of Noongar broke into a Fremantle store to steal flour and were shot at by the caretaker Peter Chidlow . Domjum , a brother of Yagan , was badly injured and died in jail a few days later . The rest of the party moved from Fremantle to Preston Point , where Yagan reportedly vowed vengeance for the death . Between 50 and 60 Noongar gathered at Bull Creek , where they met a party of settlers who were loading carts with provisions . Later that day , the group ambushed the lead cart , killing two settlers , Tom and John Velvick . Tribal law required only a single death for vengeance . Some historians have speculated that the Velvicks were targeted because they had previously been convicted for assaulting Aboriginal people and coloured seamen . Alexandra Hasluck has also argued that stealing provisions was an important motive in the attack , but this has been refuted elsewhere .

For the killing of the Velvicks , the Lieutenant @-@ Governor Frederick Irwin declared Yagan , Midgegooroo and Munday to be outlaws , offering rewards of £ 20 each for the capture of Midgegooroo and Munday , and a reward of £ 30 for Yagan 's capture , dead or alive . Munday successfully appealed against his proscription . Midgegooroo , Yagan and their group immediately moved from their territory north towards the Helena Valley . On 17 May , Midgegooroo was captured on the Helena River . After a brief , informal trial , he was executed by firing squad . Yagan remained at large for over two months .

Late in May , George Fletcher Moore reported seeing Yagan on his property and talking with him in pidgin English . Moore wrote in the Perth Gazette :

Yagan stepped forward and leaning with his left hand on my shoulder while he gesticulated with the right , delivered a sort of recitation , looking earnestly in my face . I regret I could not understand it , I thought from the tone and manner that the purport was this :

" You came to our country ? you have driven us from our haunts , and disturbed us in our occupations . As we walk in our own country we are fired upon by the white men ; why should the white men treat us so ? "

Since Moore had little knowledge of Yagan 's native language , the historian Hasluck suggests that this account is probably more indicative of " a feeling of conscience on the part of the white men " than an accurate rendering of Yagan 's state of mind .

Yagan asked Moore whether Midgegooroo was dead or alive . Moore gave no reply , but a servant answered that Midgegooroo was a prisoner on Carnac Island . Yagan warned , " White man shoot Midgegooroo , Yagan kill three . " Moore reported the encounter but made no attempt to restrain Yagan . He later wrote , " The truth is , every one wishes him taken , but no one likes to be the captor ... there is something in his daring which one is forced to admire . "

= = = Death = = =

On 11 July 1833 , two teenage brothers named William and James Keates were herding cattle along the Swan River north of Guildford when a group of Noongar approached while en route to collect flour rations from Henry Bull 's house . The Keates brothers suggested Yagan remain with

them to avoid arrest . While he was staying with them during the morning , the brothers decided to kill the warrior and claim the reward . When the natives were ready to depart , the Keates took their last opportunity . William Keates shot Yagan , and James shot Heegan , another native , in the act of throwing his spear . The brothers ran away , but other Noongar overtook William and speared him to death . James escaped by swimming the river . Shortly afterward he returned with a party of armed settlers from Bull 's estate .

When the party of settlers arrived , they found Yagan dead and Heegan dying . Heegan " was groaning and his brains were partly out when the party came , and whether humanity or brutality , a man put a gun to his head and blew it to pieces . " The settlers cut Yagan 's head from his body , and skinned his back to obtain his tribal markings as a trophy . They buried the bodies a short distance away .

James Keates claimed the reward , but his conduct was widely criticised . The Perth Gazette referred to Yagan 's killing as " a wild and treacherous act ... it is revolting to hear this lauded as a meritorious deed . " However , Daisy Bates understood that " he was killed in self @-@ defence by the young lad . " Keates left the colony the following month ; it is possible that he left from fear of being murdered in tribal retaliation .

= = Yagan 's head = =

= = = Exhibition and burial = = =

Yagan 's head was initially taken to Henry Bull 's house . Moore saw it there and sketched the head a number of times in his unpublished , handwritten diary , commenting that " possibly it may yet figure in some museum at home . " The head was preserved by smoking .

In September 1833 , Governor Irwin sailed for London , partly to give his own account of the events leading up to the killing . This was an unusual measure , especially given his regiment was about to leave for a tour of duty in India . The Colonial Office indicated satisfaction with Irwin 's administration of the colony .

Travelling with Irwin was Ensign Robert Dale , who had somehow acquired Yagan 's head . According to the historian Paul Turnbull , Dale appears to have persuaded Irwin to let him have the head as an " anthropological curiosity " . After arriving in London , Dale tried to sell the head to scientists , approaching a number of anatomists and phrenologists . His price of ? 20 failed to find a buyer , so he made an agreement with Thomas Pettigrew for the exclusive use of the head for 18 months . Pettigrew , a surgeon and antiquarian , was well known in the London social scene for holding private parties at which he unrolled and autopsied Egyptian mummies . He displayed the head on a table in front of a panoramic view of King George Sound reproduced from Dale 's sketches . For effect , the head was adorned with a fresh corded headband and feathers of the red @-@ tailed black cockatoo .

Pettigrew had the head examined by a phrenologist . Examination was considered difficult because of the large fracture across the back of the head caused by the gunshot . His conclusions were consistent with contemporary European opinion of Indigenous Australians . Dale published these in a pamphlet entitled Descriptive Account of the Panoramic View & c. of King George 's Sound and the Adjacent Country , which Pettigrew encouraged his guests to buy as a souvenir of their evening . The frontispiece of the pamphlet was a hand @-@ coloured aquatint print of Yagan 's head by the artist George Cruikshank .

Early in October 1835 , Yagan 's head and the panoramic view were returned to Dale , then living in Liverpool . On 12 October he presented them to the Liverpool Royal Institution , where the head may have been displayed in a case along with some other preserved heads and wax models illustrating cranial anatomy . In 1894 the Institution 's collections were dispersed , and Yagan 's head was lent to the Liverpool Museum ; it is thought not to have been put on display there . By the 1960s Yagan 's head was badly deteriorated . In April 1964 the museum decided to dispose of it . It arranged burial of the head on 10 April 1964 , together with a Peruvian mummy and a M?ori head .

They were buried in Everton Cemetery 's General Section 16 , grave number 296 . In later years a number of burials were made around the grave . For example , in 1968 a local hospital buried directly over the box , 20 stillborn babies and two infants who died soon after birth .

= = = Lobbying for repatriation = = =

For many years beginning in the early 1980s , a number of Noongar groups sought the return of Yagan 's head to Australia .

It is Aboriginal belief that because Yagan 's skeletal remains are incomplete , his spirit is earthbound . The uniting of his head and torso will immediately set his spirit free to continue its eternal journey .

At the time , there was no historical trail for the head after Pettigrew passed it on . Tribal elders entrusted the Aboriginal leader Ken Colbung with the search . In the early 1990s , Colbung enlisted the aid of University of London archaeologist Peter Ucko . One of Ucko 's researchers , Cressida Fforde , conducted a literature search for information on the head . Fforde successfully traced the head in December 1993 . The following April , Colbung applied to exhume the remains under Section 25 of the Burial Act 1857 . Home Office regulations required next of kin consent before disturbing the remains of the 22 infants . Colbung 's solicitors requested waiver of this condition on grounds that the exhumation would be of great personal significance to Yagan 's living relatives , and great national importance to Australia .

Meanwhile , divisions in the Noongar community in Perth began to develop . Some elders questioned Colbung 's role and one Noongar registered a complaint with the Liverpool City Council over his involvement . Media reports indicated acrimonious debate within the Noongar community about who had the best cultural qualifications to take possession of the head . The academic Hannah McGlade claims that these divisions were largely manufactured by the media , particularly The West Australian , which " aimed to and successfully represented the Nyungar community in terms of disharmony and dissent " . She alleges that one West reporter contacted Noongar who were known to be in disagreement , and quoted one to the other , so as to elicit provocative responses . The disputes were " trumpeted " by The West , allowing it to " preach " against the infighting .

On 25 July a public meeting was held in Perth . All parties agreed to put aside their differences and co @-@ operate to ensure that the repatriation was a " national success " . A Yagan Steering Committee was established to co @-@ ordinate the repatriation , and Colbung 's application was allowed to proceed . In January 1995 the Home Office advised Colbung that it was unable to waive the requirement to obtain next of kin consent for the exhumation . It contacted the five relatives whose addresses were known , and received unconditional consent from only one . Accordingly , on 30 June 1995 , Colbung and the other interested parties were advised that the application for exhumation had been rejected .

Meeting on 21 September , the Yagan Steering Committee decided to lobby Australian and British politicians for support . In 1997 Colbung was invited to visit the United Kingdom at the British government 's expense and he arrived on 20 May . His visit attracted substantial media coverage , and increased the political pressure on the British Government . He secured the support of the Prime Minister of Australia , John Howard , after gate crashing the Prime Minister 's June visit to the United Kingdom .

= = = Exhumation = = =

While Colbung was in the United Kingdom , Martin and Richard Bates were engaged to undertake a geophysical survey of the grave site . Using electromagnetic and ground penetrating radar techniques , they identified an approximate position of the box that suggested it could be accessed from the side via the adjacent plot . A report of the survey was passed to the Home Office , prompting further discussions between the British and Australian Governments .

Of concern to the Home Office were an undisclosed number of letters that it had received objecting

to Colbung 's involvement in the repatriation process ; it therefore sought assurances from the Australian Government that Colbung was a correct applicant . In response Colbung asked his elders to ask the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission ( ATSIC ) to tell the British Home Office that he was the correct applicant . ATSIC then convened a meeting in Perth at which it was again resolved that Colbung 's application could proceed .

Colbung continued to press for the exhumation , asking that it be performed before the 164th anniversary of Yagan 's death on 11 July , so that the anniversary could be the occasion of a celebration . His request was not met , and on the anniversary of Yagan 's death , Colbung conducted a short memorial service at the burial plot in Everton . He returned to Australia empty @-@ handed on 15 July .

The exhumation of Yagan 's head eventually proceeded , without Colbung 's knowledge , by excavating six feet down the side of the grave , then tunnelling horizontally to the location of the box . Thus the exhumation was performed without disturbing any other remains . The following day , a forensic palaeontologist from the University of Bradford positively identified the skull as Yagan 's by correlating the fractures with those described in Pettigrew 's report . The skull was then kept at the museum until 29 August , when it was handed over to the Liverpool City Council .

= = = Repatriation = = =

On 27 August 1997 , a delegation of Noongars consisting of Ken Colbung , Robert Bropho , Richard Wilkes and Mingli Wanjurri @-@ Nungala arrived in the UK to collect Yagan 's head . The delegation was to have been larger , but Commonwealth funding was withdrawn at the last minute . The handover of Yagan 's skull was further delayed , however , when a Noongar named Corrie Bodney applied to the Supreme Court of Western Australia for an injunction against the handover . Claiming that his family group has sole responsibility for Yagan 's remains , Bodney declared the exhumation illegal and denied the existence of any tradition or belief necessitating the head 's exhumation and removal to Australia . On 29 August , Justice Henry Wallwork rejected the injunction application , on the grounds that Bodney had previously agreed to the current arrangements , and on the evidence of another Noongar elder ( Albert Corunna , who claimed to be a closer relation of Yagan ) and anthropologist Pat Baines , both of whom refuted Bodney 's claim to sole responsibility .

Yagan 's skull was handed over to the Noongar delegation at a ceremony at Liverpool Town Hall on 31 August 1997 . In accepting the skull , Colbung made comments that were interpreted as linking Yagan 's death with the death of Diana , Princess of Wales , earlier that day :

That is how nature goes ... Nature is a carrier of all good things and all bad things . And because the Poms did the wrong thing , they now have to suffer .

Colbung 's comments prompted a media furore throughout Australia , with newspapers receiving many letters from the public expressing shock and anger at the comments . Colbung later claimed that his comments had been misinterpreted .

Throughout the repatriation process , many sections of the international media treated the story as a joke . For example , the US News & World Report ran a story under the headline Raiders of the Lost Conk , in which Yagan 's head was referred to as a " pickled curio " , and Colbung 's actions were treated as a publicity stunt .

= = = Preparations for reburial = = =

On its return to Perth , Yagan 's head continued to be a source of controversy and conflict . Responsibility for reburial of the head was given to a " Committee for the Reburial of Yagan 's Kaat " , headed by Richard Wilkes . However , the reburial was delayed by disputes between elders over the burial location , mainly due to uncertainty of the whereabouts of the rest of his body , and disagreement about the importance of burying the head with the body .

A number of attempts were made to locate the remains of Yagan 's body , which were believed to be on Lot 39 West Swan Road in the outer Perth suburb of Belhus . A remote sensing survey of the

site was carried out in 1998 , but no remains were found . An archaeological survey of the area was undertaken two years later , but this also was unsuccessful . Disputes then arose over whether the head could be buried separately from the body . Wilkes has claimed that it can , so long as it is placed where Yagan was killed , so that Dreamtime spirits can reunite the remains .

In 1998 the Western Australian Planning Commission and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs jointly published a document entitled Yagan 's Gravesite Master Plan , which discussed " matters of ownership , management , development and future use " of the property on which Yagan 's remains are believed to be buried . Under consideration was the possibility of turning the site into an Indigenous burial site , to be managed by the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board .

Yagan 's head spent some time in storage in a bank vault before being handed over to forensics experts who reconstructed a model from it . After that it was held in storage at Western Australia 's state mortuary . Plans to re @-@ bury the head were repeatedly deferred , causing ongoing conflict between Noongar groups . In September 2008 it was reported that Yagan 's head would be reburied in November , and a Yagan Memorial Park created as a projected cost of A \$ 996 @,@ 000 ; but in November it was announced that the reburial had been rescheduled for July 2009 because of logistical problems . In March 2009 , it was announced that the Department of Indigenous Affairs had given the City of Swan more than A \$ 500 @,@ 000 to develop the park .

= = = Reburial = = =

The head was finally buried in a private ceremony attended only by invited Noongar elders , on 10 July 2010 , the anniversary of the last full day he lived and one day before the end of NAIDOC Week 2010 . The site in Belhus was chosen as it is believed to be near to where the rest of Yagan 's body was buried . The burial coincided with a ceremony to mark the opening of the Yagan Memorial Park which was attended by around 300 people , including Noongar elders and State government representatives . State Premier Colin Barnett described the occasion as " a wonderful day for all West Australians . "

The art works for the Yagan Memorial Park were designed by Peter Farmer , Sandra Hill , Jenny Dawson and Kylie Ricks . Dawson and Hill created an entry wall of Yagan 's story ; Farmer designed the park entry statements and Ricks the female Coolamon .

= = Legacy = =

The repatriation of Yagan 's head increased the Aboriginal leader 's notability . He is considered a famous historical figure throughout Australia , with material about him appearing in such publications as the Australian Dictionary of Biography , and Western Australia 's school curriculum . He is of greatest significance , however , to the Noongar people , for whom he is " a revered , cherished and heroic individual ... patriot and visionary hero of WA 's South @-@ West " . The return of his head was likened by some Indigenous Australians to the November 1993 ceremonial repatriation from Gallipoli of Australia 's unknown soldier .

The former Upper Swan Bridge , which carries the Great Northern Highway over the Swan River at Belhus , was renamed the Yagan Bridge in 2010 . Also , an open plaza in the Perth central business district , constructed as part of the Perth City Link , an ongoing urban renewal project , will be named Yagan Square , having previously been referred to simply as " City Square " . The plaza , located adjacent to the Horseshoe Bridge , is expected to open in late 2016 .

= = Cultural references = =

= = = Alas Poor Yagan = = =

On 6 September 1997 The West Australian published a Dean Alston cartoon entitled Alas Poor Yagan , which was critical of the fact that the return of Yagan 's head had become a source of

conflict between Noongars instead of fostering unity . The cartoon was interpreted by some as insulting aspects of Noongar culture , and casting aspersions on the motives and legitimacy of Indigenous Australians with mixed racial heritage . The content of the cartoon offended many Indigenous Australians , and a group of Noongar elders complained about the cartoon to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission . The commission ruled that the cartoon made inappropriate references to Noongar beliefs but was not in breach of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 because it was " an artistic work " that was published " reasonably and in good faith " , and was therefore exempt . This ruling was upheld on appeal by the Federal Court of Australia , Some academic commentators have since expressed concern that the protections offered under the act have been undermined by the ruling 's broad interpretation of the exemptions .

= = = Statue = = =

From the mid @-@ 1970s , members of the Noongar community lobbied for the erection of a statue of Yagan as part of the WAY 1979 sesquicentennial celebrations . Their requests were refused , however , after then Premier of Western Australia Sir Charles Court was advised by one prominent historian that Yagan was not important enough to warrant a statue . Colbung claims " Court was more interested in spending tax payers ' money on refurbishing the badly neglected burial place of Captain James Stirling , WA 's first governor . " Despite this setback , the Noongar community persisted , establishing a Yagan Committee and running a number of fund @-@ raising drives . Eventually , sufficient funds were collected to allow the commissioning of Australian sculptor Robert Hitchcock to create a statue . The result was a life @-@ size statue in bronze , depicting Yagan standing naked with a spear held across his shoulders . Hitchcock 's statue of Yagan was officially opened by Yagan Committee chairperson Elizabeth Hanson on 11 September 1984 . It stands on Heirisson Island in the Swan River near Perth .

In 1997 , within a week of the return of Yagan 's head to Perth , vandals beheaded the statue using an angle grinder . Soon after a replacement head was installed and it too was detached and stolen . Credit for the act was anonymously claimed by a " British loyalist " as an act of retaliation for Colbung 's comments about Diana , Princess of Wales . The Western Australia Police did not succeed in identifying the vandals , nor in recovering the heads , and deemed it infeasible to have the statue fenced off or placed under guard .

Commentary on the beheadings varied widely . One column in The West Australia found humour in them , referring to the head as a " bonce " and a " noggin " , and finished with a pun on " skullduggery " . Stephen Muecke calls this the " satirical trivialising of Aboriginal concerns " ; and Adam Shoemaker writes " This is the stuff of light humour and comic relief . There is no sense of the decapitation as being an act of vandalism , even less that it could have been motivated by malevolence ... [ T ] he piece has a definite authorising function " . On the other hand , academic analysis has treated the act with much more gravity . In 2007 , for example , David Martin described the decapitation as " an act which speaks not only to the continuance of white settler racism , but also to the power of mimesis to invigorate our modern memorials and monuments with a life of their own . "

In 2002 , Member of the Western Australian Legislative Assembly Janet Woollard called for the statue 's genitalia to be covered up , but nothing was done . In November 2005 Richard Wilkes again called for the statue 's groin to be covered , on the grounds that such a depiction would be more historically accurate , as Yagan would have worn a covering for most of the year . Also under consideration is the creation of a new statue with a head shape that accords better with the forensic reconstruction of Yagan 's head .

= = = Literature and film = = =

Mary Durack published a fictionalised account of Yagan 's life in her 1964 children 's novel The Courteous Savage : Yagan of the Swan River , which was renamed Yagan of the Bibbulmun on reissue in 1976 .



The repeated beheading of Yagan 's statue in 1997 prompted Aboriginal writer Archie Weller to write a short story entitled Confessions of a Headhunter . Weller later worked with film director Sally Riley to adapt the story into a script , and in 2000 a 35 @-@ minute movie , also named Confessions of a Headhunter , was released . Directed by Sally Riley , the movie won Best Short Fiction Film at the 2000 AFI Awards . The following year the script won the Script Award in the 2001 Western Australian Premier 's Book Awards .

In 2002 , the South African @-@ born Australian poet John Masteer published his fourth collection of poems , entitled Loanwords . The collection is divided into four sections , of which the third , In the Presence of a Severed Head , has Yagan as its subject .

= = = Other cultural references = = =

A section of Kullark , a play by Jack Davis , explores the deteriorating relationship between Yagan and a settler couple .

In September 1989 an early maturing cultivar of barley , bred by the Western Australian Department of Agriculture for performance on sandy soils , was released under the name " Hordeum vulgare ( Barley ) c.v. Yagan " . Commonly referred to simply as " Yagan " , the cultivar is named for Yagan , continuing a tradition of labelling Western Australian grain cultivars after historic people of Western Australia .