

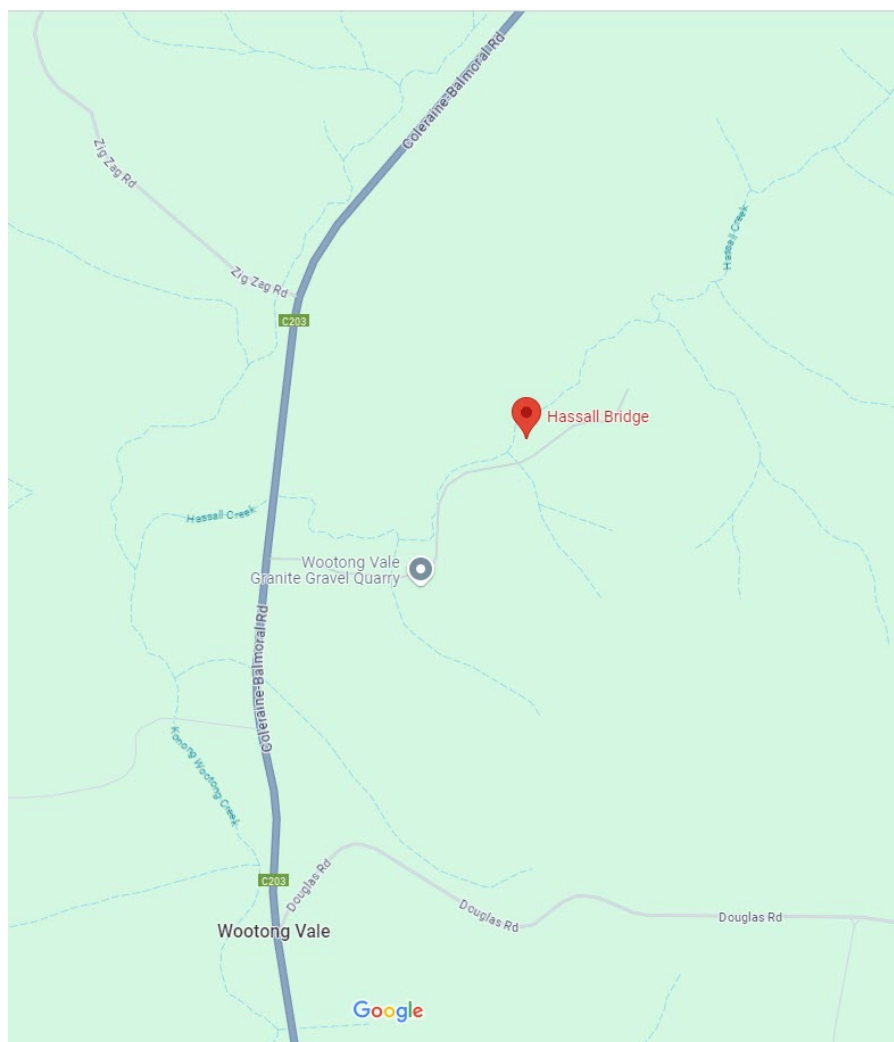
Yoorook Truth Telling Commission

From: Mary T. Hassall. [descendant of James Hassall]

Re: Hassall Creek and Wootong Vale, Victoria. 3315
Gunditjimara Land.

Contains Loving Memories of Gunditjimara Elders of the Lovett family who have died.p.4

Map of Hassall Creek



This is Hassall Creek. It is named after my Great great Grandfather James Hassall (1802-1862). It is part of Gunditj Country and it's name should reflect that. I support any action to give It back It's original name/s.

My G.G.Grandfather on my father's side, James Hassall was born in Parramatta 1802, the son of Rowland and Elizabeth Hassall, South sea missionaries, who had arrived in Botany bay in 1798, and settled around Paramatta NSW. He was the fifth of 8 children.

In 1850 James, then aged 48, with his wife Great great Grandmother Catherine Lloyd Hassall travelled with their 4 children overland from Camden NSW to Western Victoria. Farmers, they leased a property at Lake Wallace, Edenhope for 5 years. Then in 1855 they bought the property "Wootong Vale", in the KonongWootong district 4-8 k north of Coleraine. A creek, now known as Hassall Creek runs through the area.

My Great Grandfather, George Ernest Hassall, their 10th child was born there in Wootong Vale in 1861. His father James died riding a horse on the property the following year 1862, aged 60, and is buried at Coleraine cemetery. Catherine stayed at Wootong Vale with her numerous children for nine more years, until she sold up in 1871, when Great Grandfather George was 10. They moved to the Balmoral district.

So, although the Hassall family was only at Wootong Vale for 16 years, their name remains there with Hassall Creek. I have chosen to investigate this area for the Yoorook Commission, as it was there that the first of my ancestors settled in Victoria. The place where one G.G.Grandfather died and one Great Grandfather was born.

My Introduction to truth telling-

In 2023 a weekend reunion of the Hassall family in Paramatta was organised by the Hassall Family History Association- (who are based in NSW and Qld) to celebrate 225 years in Australia. There were various activities over the weekend. My cousin Danielle Hassall, a Victorian descendant of James, ran a session on

introduction to Truth telling- investigating Hassall's relationships with First Nation Peoples.

We watched an episode of "The Australian Wars", listened to some readings from old diaries, then did a 'Mapping' exercise, where we divided into the 8 lines, mapping where our ancestors settled /noting the Lands and tribes of these places. I was in the descendants of James group, and we tracked his life journey from his birth in Paramatta, his first land grant at the age of 11, land in Cobbity and Bathurst, [Dharug and Wirajiri Countries] to his journey to Victoria and the final years of his life at Wootong Vale, in Gunditjmarra Country where he died in 1862.

More recently, Danielle told me about Yoorook Truth telling and I began to look more closely at the Hassalls in Victoria, particularly at Wootong Vale and Hassall Creek. She has encouraged me to put this submission together, even though I haven't been there yet, am not a historian and know very little about their life there. I am very interested and would like to explore further.

As it is I live the solitary life of an aged pensioner on the outskirts of a country town in DjaDjaWurrung Country. I don't get around much anymore, but Hassall Creek is on my bucket list, an increasingly important place for me to visit.

Meantime, for now I do a bit of googling around freely available information around Wootong Vale and Hassall Creek.

This is what I have found out, so far- information to share with other Hassalls. Wootong Vale and Hassall Creek were/are on the land of a Gunditjmarra clan called the Konongwootong-gunditj. Today the area called KonongWootong shares a postcode with Wootong Vale 3315. Wikipedia says KonongWootong means- Creek on grassy plain! If so, it's clear that Life round the creeks/ waterholes and wetlands was a central part of local cultural livelihood and identity.

In 1855 when the Hassalls arrived, the area around Wootong Vale had been in a state of War for at least 25 years. The Fighting Gunditjimara were resisting the invasion of the British Colonists - in battles referred to today as the Eumeralla Wars -1830-1860.

In 1840, the Konongwootong- Gundidj clan suffered two terrible massacres in the area: The "Fighting Hills massacre" on 8 March 1840, when 50-80 people were killed by squatters, (led by Whyte brothers ?) -no evidence? Charges dropped!

And then, a month later in April 1840, in what is known as the "Fighting Waterholes massacre", white colonists killed 60 Jardwadjali people of the Konongwootong- Gundidj clan.

Both these massacres have been proven and acknowledged by government agencies, the council and the waterboard. After the flood in 2012 the bones were found. In 2014, the Wannon Water board and Members from Gunditj-Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation [GMTOAC] put up a monument at Konongwootong Reservoir called Konongwootong Quiet Place as a memorial. Lest we forget.

Of course, the Gunditj people have always known about these atrocities. And I thought I knew. When I lived at Hoddle St. Collingwood high rise flats twenty years ago, I joined the BEEM art team, led by the Late Gunditjimara Elders and Siblings, Uncle B. Uncle E. and Aunty D. Lovett. We painted many murals around Collingwood over the years, 1999-2011.

The first Beem painting was about the Eumeralla wars. In Ivans barbershop on Smith St. Figures high on the rocks keeping watch at night. And our big one at the underground carpark in Harmsworth st. @Hoddle St. Collingwood flats, 'Cave Painting'. It depicts a family group in a cave, high up in the rocks, young and old hiding out, under siege, young warriors keeping watch at night.

I'd seen some of these places. I remember a trip to Lake Condah when Uncle E and Aunty D. took a mini bus full of us parkies from Collingwood to Condah, and the many stops along the way at rocky places and told of the Histories and stories there. The paintings we did of the High Rocky ground where the Ancestors sought shelter from the slaughter. I had never made the connection with my ancestors being in that same area, just up the road. Until recently, when I began to research it all- Because of Yoorook Truth telling.

I'm shocked and saddened that my ancestors were so close to these places, these massacres. Most of the early settler family stories I knew were all around Paramatta and NSW. I wonder now, how much did they know about the blood spilt on the land they were building their dream house and farm on? Information was around at the time that squatters like the Whyte brothers and co were killing people "clearing the land". Ethnic cleansing. They were charged but acquitted due to lack of evidence and witnesses. Aboriginal people were not heard as witnesses in the courts / truth was not permitted to be told. The settler community averted their gaze from the reality of the horror and terror visited upon the resident communities. It was in their interest and not a nice subject to talk about in polite society. Silence.

Looking back to the 1850's along Hassall Creek, I'm realising James and Catherine must have known what had been going on with the killing of Aboriginal people on the land they were settling- "opening up" for sheep farming, especially as they were actual sheep farmers. Did they buy the land because it had been cleared of Aboriginals in a genocide in the area? By 1855 most of the survivors were escaping the wars or being moved to missions so the settlers could enjoy illegal sovereignty of "their" land. I need to find out more about what went on there over the years 1855-71.

So where do we go from here?

Firstly I must finish this paper before the end of November.

Then GO to Hassall Creek! I've looked at vague blue squiggles on maps, but still never been there. I want to Breathe the air. Look listen cry. Draw-paint. My daughter Alice has promised to drive me there sometime over summer.

-Contact the Gundidjtj-Mirring Aboriginal Traditional Owners Corporation to offer our support around caring for and re-naming Hassall creek It's original and True Names. Learn about how the people used to live around and along the creek.

-Share the information about Hassall Creek and its original inhabitants among my extended family- especially Victorian descendants of James and George Hassall. Seek their interest in supporting re-naming and any other issues around Hassall creek.

-Visit the Monument, Konongwootong-Quiet-Place to acknowledge what really happened to the people around there/ even if our ancestors turned a blind eye at the time to paying mass murderers for stolen land.

Down the track I hope to gather pictures, memories and info I have on the BEEM team and our Murals for prosperity. And keep painting landscapes. The Arts, Sports, Painting, Song and Dance, Film and Tv, and Comedy have been doing Truth telling for years.

"To make a good song, all you need is 3 chords and the Truth"

Bob Dylan.

Sadly Political, Educational and Legal structures take such a lot of work and long time to act on anything. Truth gets shelved for another day, even though we know the obvious truth of dire need right now in some Aboriginal communities and lands.

My respects to the Commissioners and all those working on these exhausting processes of Truth telling. I hope it all helps in whatever way to bring peace and prosperity back to Aboriginal Families and Homelands.

I agree to Yoorook publishing my submission including my name.

Mary T. Hassall. 30 November 2024.

References

Books: 'The Hassall Family -Celebrating 200 years in Australia 1798-1998.' Edited by David J. Hassall.

Wikipedia: - Fighting Waterholes Massacre.

- Fighting Hills Massacre.

Websites: 1. victorianplaces.com.au/konongwootong

2. monumentaustralia.org.au/103088-konongwootong-quiet-place

3. www.gunditjmirring.com

