

Ommaney/Ommanney/Hominy - the Man, the Hill and the Myths

The common understanding of why the hill Mt Ommaney was named illustrates how historical myths (i.e. inaccurate information) are created. So the story goes, Dr Stephen Simpson's nephew, John Mansel Ommanney, was a midshipman visiting his uncle at Wolston Estate while on leave. He died as a result of a horse-riding accident and Mt Ommaney was named - so the story goes - in commemoration of him. This account, that appears to have originated in an 1892 publication by Nehemiah Bartley, contains several unfounded statements.



John Ommanney

Ommaney family letters reveal that in reality, John Mansel Ommanney (spelt with a double 'n') came to Australia as a lad of 16, after finishing school, to learn the ropes of being a grazier from his great-uncle (not uncle) Stephen Simpson. His parents were concerned to arrange a future for him and made the arrangement with Dr Simpson. John was not a midshipman. Far from being on leave, he had been living with and working for his great-uncle for well over two years at the time of the horse-riding accident that led to his death.

There were also varying accounts of the accident that led to John's death. The most reliable are the statement of the Government Engineer, Mr Saunderson, who happened to have ridden with John from Oxley to Wolston Estate on the occasion that the accident occurred, and the account that Stephen Simpson himself provided in letters to John's parents.

John, on horseback, had been escorting mares to Wolston. When John, Mr Saunderson and the horses reached the gate to the Wolston home paddock, the horses rushed to the creek - Wolston creek south (i.e. Wacol) side - to drink. As two horses did not belong to Stephen Simpson, John rode after them to separate them. He did not return. Mr Saunderson raised the alarm.

After an hour of searching, an aborigine who was assisting found John. It was subsequently considered that the horse had stumbled on the slippery banks of the creek and that John, due to an inappropriate habit that he had of riding with his foot down, had not fallen from the horse but had been dragged with his foot caught in the stirrup, hitting his head on fallen logs. Having been found unconscious and taken to Wolston House, he was attended immediately by his great-uncle Simpson who was a qualified doctor and then by Dr Cannon, the consulting surgeon for the Brisbane hospital and also the District Coroner, who had been sent for immediately. John did not regain consciousness and died the following day.

The notion that Mt Ommaney was named in commemoration of John Mansel Ommanney after his death is patently wrong. In reality, the name Mt Ommaney - spelt with a single 'n' - was being applied to the local hill in August 1846, as can be seen in the original typescript of a newspaper article, over 9 years prior to John's death and over 7 years before his arrival in Queensland in December 1853. There

are other examples of usage of the name Mt Ommaney prior to John's arrival in Australia. For example, a local resident writing to the surveyor-general requesting that land be surveyed, referred to land at 'Mount Ommaney'.

The official spelling of the name of the hill and local places associated with it was 'Hominy' from the early 1860s until the late 1940s/1950. Hominy was a maize-based cereal that has been recognized in placenames in NSW as well as in USA. In 19th century Australia, the spelling 'ommaney' was also used to refer to the cereal. This has given rise to speculation that the naming of the hill was associated with the cereal.

To date, no firm evidence has been found for the reason for Mt Ommaney's name. For a more detailed discussion of these issues, including source materials for the above statements, see the following -

(1) Chapter on John Mansel Ommaney in Meg Gordon (2013) *Pastoralists of Brisbane Town's Fringe*, published by Centenary Suburbs Historical Society. This does not deal with the issue of Mt Ommaney's name but does give an account of John Mansel Ommaney himself, the circumstances in which he came to Australia, why and when he came and the circumstances of his death.

(2) Meg Gordon 'Mount Ommaney/Hominy - Whence the Name?' in *Queensland History Journal*, vol. 22, no. 6, Aug. 2014. This provides the evidence for the use of the name prior to John's arrival in Australia and examines the various explanations for it.

Meg Gordon, Centenary Suburbs Historical Society, July 2016.



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