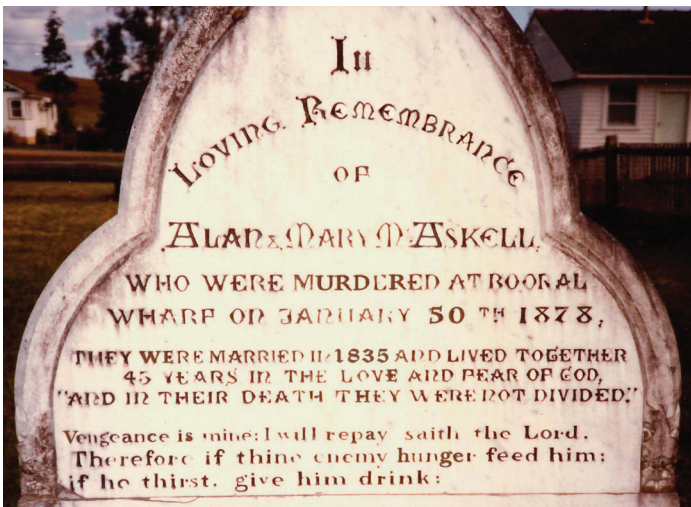




THE PIONEER

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The Tragedy at Booral Wharf – Feb 1878



In the grounds of the Church of England at Stroud stands a headstone in remembrance of Alan & Mary McAskell who were brutally murdered at Booral Wharf in 1878.

Alan & Mary left the highlands of Scotland & sailed for Australia in 1837. Except for settling on the Allyn River little is known of the McAskells until they took up land on the Karuah River at Booral Wharf where Alan acted as wharfinger for the A.A.Co. There were three children to the marriage. Jane, who was born on board ship on the way to Australia married William Farley & became the mother of the late "Alby" Farley. Mary Ann became Mrs John Cameron & settled in the Wingham district. Their only son Alan remained unmarried.

The murder is said to have occurred at Booral Wharf, about seven miles from Stroud, and the first information of the dreadful matter was given by a horseman who galloped into town, and said that an old man and his wife had been murdered-the latter being also burned to ashes. Mr. Thomas Laman, the Police Magistrate at once sent for constables to investigate the matter, and on the following day the body of the man, and the ashes of the unfortunate woman which could be collected from the fire, were taken into Stroud to

await an inquest. This was duly held, and the first witness called was David Cowan, a senior constable. This man's statement was to the effect that he was sent for from Bulahdelah on February the 1st by a telegram which informed him that a man named Allan McAskell had been found dead, and apparently murdered, near Booral Wharf. The body had evidently been thrown into a gully, and when he first saw it, it had caught in a small stump. This prevented it reaching the bottom of the gully. In the deceased's pockets, there were two half sovereigns, £1 19s in silver, and 7d. in copper. He last saw McAskell alive in Stroud on January 31, collecting wharfage dues, he being a wharfinger at Booral. After seeing to the body he and another constable went to McAskell's residence, which they found smoldering in ashes. On searching here £46 in gold were found, much affected by the heat, also a lump of silver and two pennies. He and others proceeded to the upper or new store and wharfinger's residence at Booral, but these were found burnt down. Even then the fire was raging fiercely, and they could not go near it. Afterwards, however, they got sufficiently close to see what was believed to be human remains. On the road back to McAskell's body they saw fresh footprints of two persons, one of whom must have worn smooth soled boots, and the other nailed boots. Patrick Casey, a farmer, also gave evidence as to the finding of the body, and also of the unsuccessful attempts to recover Mrs. McAskell's remains from the fire. A number of bones were eventually removed from the ashes of the buildings. They evidently belonged to Mrs McAskell, who must have been killed while doing some needlework, as a pair of scissors was found near them. There is a great mystery about the affair, but judging from the facts brought to light a most foul double murder was committed.

The case was unsolved and therefore the mystery remains to this day.

Information sourced from a digital copy of The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser (NSW : 1843 - 1893) through www.trove.nla.gov.au, The Stroud Historical Society & Research by Kevin Farley.



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