

John Matthew Pitman (1789 – 1863)

John Matthew Pitman was born on 27th June, 1789 in Westonzoyland ¹, a small farming community in Somerset, England. On the 23rd August, 1813, at the Somerset Assizes, John was convicted for stealing a horse valued at £20 and was sentenced to be hanged. He was reprieved and committed to transportation for the term of his natural life.

After spending six months in a Convict Hulk in the River Thames, he left England on 22nd February, 1814 on the “Surrey”. The ship arrived in Port Jackson on 28th July, 1814 but owing to an outbreak of Typhus during the five month voyage (killing 51 people including the Captain), John Pitman was in quarantine until 18th August, 1814. He was then assigned to William Cox to work on his properties in the Windsor and Richmond area. Having come from a rural background, John would not have found farm labour difficult despite the primitive conditions and harsh climate of the Colony.

Ten years later he was granted a Ticket of Leave on 24th July, 1824. This granted convicts the right to travel between certain points and visit certain places for a specific period of time. Then because of his continued good behaviour he was granted a Conditional Pardon in November 1835 by Gov. Richard Bourke. John Pitman was now a free man but could never return to England. In the record of his pardon John is described as a Labourer being 5' 9 ¼" tall, with dark eyes, brown to grey hair and a ruddy complexion.

On 12th April, 1824 John had married Mary Sunderland, who had been born in Richmond in 1810. They were married in the original Christ Church, Castlereagh by the Rev Henry Fulton. This church, built in 1813, was a simple wooden building which also served as a school. It was located in Church Street not far from the Castlereagh Burial Grounds which had been decreed by Gov. Macquarie. The building was destroyed by fire in the 1870s. Mary was only 14 years old to John Matthew's 35 years when they married, but this would not have been unusual in those times as there was a shortage of women in the Colony.

John must have been not only a man of good conduct but also industrious. Convicts were paid wages and William Cox was known for the fair treatment of his assigned convicts. By 1839, letters and Deed documents show that John Pitman had purchased two farms. A property of 60 acres named “Linley Farm” (later spelt as “Lindley”) was purchased from John Francis in about 1834². It appears that John Pitman was living on this property although the transfer of Deeds didn't take place until 1839.

An adjoining property of 30 acres, which Pitman requested be named “Rose Farm” in the Deeds, was purchased by him for “a valuable consideration”³ from Thomas Smith in 1839.

These properties were located in the vicinity of present day Mountain View Close and the Diamond Hill Estate in Kurrajong Hills.

¹ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=15118> History of Westonzoyland

² Letter from John Francis requesting transfer of Deeds, dated 17th September, 1839

³ Letter dated 27th July, 1839 from T Smith requesting issue of Deed to John Pitman



Just where John Pitman built a house and how he farmed the land is open to speculation. "Lindley Farm" had Blue Gum Creek as a water supply and it is probable that he ran cattle and perhaps had an orchard. Life, though, would have been tough in this rugged, isolated countryside.

John and Mary had 10 children, the youngest being Charles Albert, born on the 1st December, 1843. At some time between Charles' birth and the birth of a child called Robert in 1848 (for whom no father's name was given), Mary left John and went to live in Warkworth near Singleton, taking most or all of the children with her. The date of or the reason for Mary's departure from Kurrajong is unknown. However, after the death of John she married Richard Gibbs.

In 1846 John had been brought to trial for his part in the selling of cattle stolen by Richard Gibbs from the Hunter Valley.⁴

John Matthew Pitman continued to live on his land and died at 74 years of age in 1863. He is buried in St Peter's Anglican Cemetery, Richmond.

His youngest son Charles Albert, who changed the spelling of the surname to Pittman (although his grave stone has a single "t"), appears to have either acquired or inherited the properties. He farmed them as a citrus orchard. He helped build St David's Presbyterian (now Uniting) Church at Kurrajong Heights. He died in 1936 at the age of 93 years and is buried in St David's Cemetery.

The property remained in the hands of Charles' daughters Blanche (born in 1873) and Minnie Gertrude (born in 1884), both of whom remained unmarried. They worked the farm until their house, which was situated on a small ridge in present day Mountain

⁴ The Sydney Morning Herald, 8th September, 1846

View Close, was burnt down in the severe bushfires of early December 1944. Blanche, aged 71, was killed in the fire⁵. The properties were subsequently sold to George Sydney Rayner and then further subdivided in the 1970s.

Approximate boundaries of Rose and Lindley Farms, as indicated on Parish Maps dating back to 1881:



Compiled by Jennifer Griffiths
(Resident on a small part of the land once belonging to John Matthew Pitman)
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The information about John Matthew Pitman is based on the research of Thelma Evans, a Pitman descendant, to whom I'm most grateful for her willingness to share it with me.

Ref: "John Matthew Pitman Pittman: his ancestors and his descendants" by Thelma (Pitman) Evans. Self published, 2008.

⁵ Brief report in The Mercury (Hobart) 13th December, 1944