

Pitmans at Kooringa, Marysville

Clarence Pitman bought Kooringa and settled there with his wife and two of his children. Tragedy struck this family on several occasions. Clarence, Olive and Gwendoline all dying in Marysville.

Pitman Shorthand

Clarence Thomas Pitman, son of Jacob Pitman who had been born in Adelaide in 1848, came with his family to Victoria. Jacob Pitman was the brother of Sir Isaac Pitman (1813-1897) who invented his phonetic system of shorthand which he first published in 1837 in Bath, England. Its popularity led him to becoming a publisher and printer with offices around the world including Melbourne.

Sir Isaac's brothers went to the new world to spread the word on their brother's shorthand system. Jacob Pitman arrived in Adelaide in 1838 with 100 copies of Sir Isaac's textbook fresh off the press. He lived for a time in Geelong and later in life in Sydney where he died in 1890.

For a long time, Pitman was the most commonly used shorthand system in the entire English-speaking world. Part of its popularity was due to the fact that it was the first subject taught by correspondence course. Sir Isaac's nephew Clarence carried on the promotion of his uncle's shorthand system being reported in the Melbourne papers giving lectures.

Clarence Pitman and family

Clarence Thomas Pitman married Caroline Anna Blood Newenham in 1871 in Melbourne where they settled in St Kilda and had the following children all born in Melbourne— Henry Newenham Pitman 1872-73, Carrie Rosalind Persse Pitman 1874-1948 who married Reginald William Stringer in 1897 in Albany, WA¹, Alice Burton Pitman 1875-75, Clarence Edward Pitman 1877-77, Newenham Mueller Pitman, 1880-1933 married² Olive Birch – daughter Constance May Pitman, Olive Dora Blakeney Pitman 1885-1926, Gwendoline de Burgh Pitman, 1890-1931.

In 1917 Clarence Thomas Pitman moved with wife Caroline Anna and adult daughters Olive Dora Blakeney Pitman and Gwendoline De Burgh Pitman to Upper Beaconsfield and the guesthouse "Runnymede"³.

In 1918⁴ the family came to Marysville and purchased Kooringa Guesthouse and in the electoral roll Clarence listed his occupation as accountant and the ladies as home duties. In Kooringa Guesthouse advertisements Olive was listed as the guesthouse proprietress and after her death Gwendoline as proprietress.

On 9th March 1926 Clarence died in Marysville. Throughout his life Clarence had been promoting Pitman shorthand, conducting lectures and judging speed competitions.⁵ See Appendix I for newspaper articles.

In July 1926 Olive Dora Blakeney Pitman went for a walk, supposedly to visit her father's grave at the cemetery, never to return. See Appendix II for newspaper articles.

In the Kooringa Guesthouse advertisements sister, Olive was listed as the guesthouse proprietress until sometime after her death. In 1927 Lilian May Shelton was listed in the Electoral roll as being the manageress at Kooringa. Then for a short period in the advertisements Gwendoline was proprietress.

Struggling to continue Gwen finally applied in December 1929 to the court for probate of Olive's Will in which she left £600 to Gwendoline. This was granted. £600 was a considerable amount at the time. About this time Thomas Henry Branchflower built the Log Cabin using traditional methods, no nails⁶.

By July 1930 Wilbur Anderson was at Kooringa and Gwendoline operated an artist and souvenir shop in the newly built Log Cabin in partnership with Peter Mackey, a Melbourne optician and artist. Peter lived in Melbourne and Gwendoline at the Log Cabin. She also was hairdresser to the tourists in town.

She lived there until she died in Marysville in 1931 from severe burns. She used a small petrol stove for cooking. The circumstances were not straight forward and it could well have been that she took her own life. See Appendix III

In 1931 Marysville Art Exhibition.

An art exhibition will, be held in the Log Cabin, Marysville, on Wednesday afternoon, including paint-

ings by noted Melbourne artists,
etchings, pictorial art photography
and arts and crafts generally. Special
cars will leave Healesville at 2 o'clock,
at half the usual fare.

Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian Sat 22 Aug 1931

Caroline Anna Pitman had left Marysville when Koorunga was sold and she was living in Sandringham with her son Newenham Mueller Pitman, who committed suicide in August 1933 due to financial difficulties in his business. See Appendix IV for newspaper articles.

Caroline Anna Pitman who died in 1937 had status in Melbourne as a descendant of the famous Newenham Family. See Appendix V for the Washington Letter and the Newenham Family.

APPENDIX I- PITMAN'S SHORTHAND

Ovens and Murray Advertiser 13 Aug 1892

The wide world o'er shorthand and typewriters will be glad to hear that at an exhibition at Messrs Stott and Hoare's new rooms, Collins Street, on Monday night,, Mr. Chartres, chief: of the staff of the firm, wrote, on Pitman's system 600 words in 2 minutes 55 seconds, and that these were subsequently reproduced on the Remington typewriter at the rate of sixty words per minute. Mr Clarence Pitman, nephew of the inventor of phonography. was one of the guests, and I confess that while as a practical journalist I utterly abjure the Pitman system of phonography, I am bound to say as a typewriter I have found nothing to last like the Remington.

The Argus, 26 Sep 1892

A free lecture on Pitman's shorthand (phono graph) was given in the Brighton Free Library on Friday evening by Mr Clarence Pitman, nephew of the inventor. There was a full attendance, and Mr H R Reid, president of the institute, occupied the chair. In introducing the lecturer, the chairman spoke of the main advantages of shorthand and how absolutely necessary it was for young people to learn it. Mr Pitman departed considerably from the customary dry as-dust method of treating the subject, and the audience, judging from the frequent laughter, were much amused. The salient features in the history of shorthand were not, however, lost sight of. The reading by the author at the age of 16 of Walkers pronouncing dictionary, and also his subsequent laborious three years' labour in correcting Bagster's great comprehensive Bible, and the helping hand Mr Bagster gave in publishing the first editions of phonography, were briefly touched upon. A short quotation from a speech made by Mr John Bright when presiding at a lecture given by Henry Pitman at Rochdale in the forties concluded a very interesting lecture Mr Bright's words were

"We are extremely indebted to Mr Henry Pitman for the very handsome manner in which he has come forward in offering to teach gratuitously all such as find it difficult to pay, and unfortunately there are too many such in these days" Mr Clarence Pitman made the same offer at Brighton on Friday evening. A notice to residents of Brighton appears in our advertising columns.

The Age, 5 Oct 1892, page 6

LECTURE ON PHONOGRAPHY

The second of a series of lectures on Phonography was given by Mr. Clarence Pitman, in the Union Church, Caulfield, on Monday evening, under the auspices of the Caulfield Union Church Literary and Debating Society. Mr. Miller occupied the chair. The early history of shorthand and its somewhat vague records were briefly touched upon by the lecturer. The real birth of the art, however, took place when Isaac Pitman invented phonography in 1837. The following points formed matter for an interesting address, which seemed to be much enjoyed by the audience: —
The untiring diligence of Isaac Pitman for more than 50 years in improving and extending the art; the very small relaxation of his effort even now, when over 80 years of age, and the commercial success of the invention assured ; the advantages of a thorough and practical acquaintance with shorthand to all classes of the community; David Copperfield's attempt to learn shorthand; freemasonry in phonography ; illustrations of its brevity. Mr. Pitman intends to give the next lecture at Kew, on the 12th inst.

LECTURE ON PHONOGRAPHY

A lecture on the above subject was delivered by Mr. Clarence Pitman at the Wesleyan Church, Graham-street, on Tuesday night, under the auspices of the Wesleyan and Presbyterian Mutual Improvement Associations. Mr. C. Kilpatrick occupied the chair, and there was a large attendance of members and visitors.

Mr. Pitman delivered the lecture in a most entertaining manner. His language was accurate, and throughout there were constant flashes of humor, incident and poetry, and what was expected to be a dry discourse on an abstruse subject proved to be an exceedingly interesting piece of oratory. The lecturer pointed out that some form of writing had been in vogue from a very early period of the world's history, and went on to refer to the different styles of hieroglyphics used by the ancients and then to the different forms of stenography which were in vogue at the time Mr. Isaac Pitman (uncle of the lecturer) introduced the popular form of phonography now in common use not only by Pressmen but by almost every professional man and merchant of any standing. The blackboard was brought freely into play during the lecture, and the elementary signs on which Pitman's system of phonography was built clearly explained. The audience was informed that there are 40 different sounds in the English language, and these are represented by 40 different signs. The uses of the vowels and consonants were also described, and some amusing instances given to show how different letters changed their sound in different words. The speaker urged his hearers to study the system for themselves, pointing out its various uses and stated plainly that the reason so many failed to succeed who commenced the study was on account of laziness.

A hearty vote of thanks was tendered to the lecturer on the motion of the chairman, seconded by Mr. J. Brown, and it was then intimated that if sufficient encouragement were given Mr. Pitman would form a class for teaching phonography in Port Melbourne.

Miss Persse Pitman's Wedding

It is interesting to note that Mrs Clarence Pitman had travelled to Perth to give away her daughter.

Melbourne Punch 22 Jul 1897

STRINGER—PITMAN.

The marriage of Miss Persse Pitman, eldest daughter of Mr. Clarence Pitman, of Melbourne, to Mr. B. W. Stringer, of Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, third son of Lieut. Joseph Henry Stringer, of Christchurch, New Zealand, took place quietly at St. John's Church, Albany, Western Australia, on Monday, 5th July. The Officiating minister, being the Rev. D. J. Garland. The bride was given away by her mother, who wore a dark green fancy cloth costume trimmed with fur; green velvet bonnet. The pretty bride wore a smart travelling costume of fawn tailor-made coat and skirt, and pretty pale old gold silk blouse trimmed with lace; fawn felt hat trimmed with velvet to match her costume, and bunches of violets. The wedding gifts were numerous and costly, amongst which were some substantial cheques from friends in different colonies. One of the gifts, presented by the bride's mother to her daughter, was a very valuable piece of old lace (an heirloom), which was worn by one of the Queens of England, also some fine old Limerick lace which was part of her grandmother's wedding dress. After the ceremony had taken place, the bride and bridegroom left for Claremont, Perth en route for Kalgoorlie.

APPENDIX II – OLIVE'S FATE

Newspapers of the times reported the disappearance and the following give the best details.

LOST IN THE BUSH

Marysville Woman Missing

MARYSVILLE, Sunday – Fears are entertained here for the safety of Miss Olive B Pitman, aged 39 years, who has been missing since Thursday. Miss Pitman, who is the proprietress of Koorunga guest house, and is therefore known to a large circle of people, suffered from bad health two years ago, and eventually went to Melbourne for treatment. Returning on Monday her friends were glad to observe that apparently she was in excellent health, an impression which the succeeding days did nothing to destroy.

After breakfast on Thursday morning Miss Pitman left home without saying where she was going, but Mrs Pitman presumed that her daughter had gone to the cemetery to visit the grave of her father who died a few months ago. As the walk to the cemetery takes about 30 minutes no anxiety was felt when she did not return before noon. As the hour for luncheon came and went without any sign of her daughter, Mrs Pitman became anxious and requested the assistance of Constable Barton. During the afternoon the constable searched the district without success, and in the evening he reported the matter to Mounted-Constable Ware. He on Friday morning organised a search party, the efforts of which met with no better result than those of the previous day.

The search was resumed on Saturday morning, and six miles out, on the Woods Point road, Constable Barton observed the marks of a woman's shoe. He was only able to follow the trail for a short distance, as the heavy rain had washed out the tracks on soft ground. The tracks were valuable as indicating the direction which had been taken by Miss Pitman and when the black trackers who had been asked for arrived from Melbourne they were driven in a car to the point where the imprints ended. The trackers immediately took up the trail, and went into the bush. Up to this evening nothing has been heard from them, nor have the police been able to find anyone who saw Miss Pitman after she left the township.

Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian

Sat 17 July 1926 page 2

A MARYSVILLE SENSATION LOST IN THE BUSH

Miss Olive B Pitman, proprietress of "Koorunga" guest house, Marysville, has been missing from her home for over a week, and notwithstanding the systematic search that has been carried out the efforts to trace her have so far been unsuccessful. Practically all hope of finding her alive has now been abandoned.

To-morrow (Sunday) a big effort will be made, and a search party comprising bushmen from all over the district will make a start to thoroughly comb the heavy bush between Marysville and Cumberland Falls. Arrangements are being made for a party of volunteers from Healesville to make an early start in the morning.

Last Thursday week, shortly after 8am, Miss Pitman left home, and an hour and half later she was seen passing Kerami, walking in the direction of Cumberland. As she did not return during the afternoon several residents organised a search but without avail. Next day, about 36 hours after Miss Pitman had left home, the police were informed, and Mounted-Constable Ware, with a search party, combed the country without result. The services of black trackers had been requisitioned, and on Saturday morning the search was resumed. On the Woods' Point road, six miles from Marysville, the footprints of a woman's shoe were found, but owing to the heavy rain that had fallen it was only possible to follow the tracks for a short distance. The black trackers picked up the trail again at the Cumberland Bridge, about 13 miles from Marysville, but it suddenly disappeared, and since then no indication of the direction taken by the lost woman has been found.

Every day parties of men have scoured the heavy bush country unavailingly, and on Tuesday the black trackers gave up their search. On Wednesday Mounted-Constable Constable of Healesville, with Mounted-Constable Ware of Marysville had charge of the search parties, but no success rewarded their efforts. The searchers are still out, but the country is so rough and rugged, and thick with scrub and heavy timber that the task of ever finding Miss Pitman's body is not considered hopeful.

Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian
24 Jul 1926

LOST IN THE MOUNTAINS.

To the Editor. Sir,-Permit me to use your columns to thank those residents of Healesville, Marysville and adjacent districts who have so kindly and unreservedly used their time, strength and resources in searching for my daughter. Although success has not attended their efforts, it has been a great consolation under the terrible calamity which has befallen me, to find so many kind-hearted friends amongst my neighbours. Thanking you in anticipation.-Yours, etc.,
C. A. PITMAN.

"Kooringa," Marysville, July 20, 1926.

The Age, 6 Dec 1929, page 9

AN OLD MARYSVILLE SENSATION.

Miss Pitman's Mysterious Disappearance.

Probate of Will ' Granted.

When Miss Olive Blakeney Pitman, of Kooringa, guest house, Marysville, disappeared mysteriously in July, 1926, a search extending over ten days was made of the country surrounding Marysville and Wood's Point, but no trace could be found of the woman, and it was presumed she died from exposure. The matter was recalled yesterday when, before Sir Justice Wasley, in the Practice Court, Miss Gwendolyn Pitman made application for probate of her sister's will on the presumption that she had died. Miss Pitman left a will, dated 3rd May, 1922, in which she bequeathed her estate, valued at £600, to her sister. The Registrar of Probates (Mr. T. Kelly) minuted the file that the papers were in order, but as a period of seven years had not elapsed since the disappearance of Miss Pitman the matter was 'referred to' say whether or not the application for probate should be granted. Mr. Ellis (instructed by Messrs. Cloverdon and Hayes) appeared for Miss Gwendolyn Pitman in support of the application. In an affidavit she said that, with her sister, she was the proprietor of the guest house Kooringa. Her sister was 41 years of age when she disappeared about 8 a.m. on the morning of 8th July. The weather at the time was bitterly cold, and there was 'snow' on the mountains. Mr. Ellis said two years before Miss Pitman disappeared she had a severe illness, which left her health impaired and she was under medical supervision. The previous day they had heard for the first time that two women living in Richmond believed they had seen Miss Olive Pitman in a train in July last. These two women had never spoken to Miss Pitman, although they had seen her when making visits to Marysville, and knew her by

sight. It was contended it was a clear case of mistaken identity, in view of the evidence placed before the court in affidavits. His Honor I think so, too. In any case, no harm would be done, as the property was left to the sister. Frederick John Barton, of Marysville, storekeeper, in an affidavit said on 9th July, with Constable Ware, he organised a search party, which concentrated its efforts along Wood's Point-road and its vicinity in an endeavour, to find the missing woman. Detectives and black trackers later joined in the search, and on 11th July the inner sole, of a shoe was found, and it fitted into a spare shoe of Miss Olive Pitman. He was of the opinion that she left the road and went into the bush at a point where the sole was discovered, and that she got lost on or about the, Cumberland Hills and perished from exposure. The country was extremely wild and rugged. His Honor said that on the evidence before the court he, thought Miss Pitman perished about the time of her disappearance. He would make the order asked for and grant probate of the will.

Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian
11 Feb, 1939 page 2

Marysville Mystery.

The disappearance of a woman from Marysville more than 12 years ago may yet be solved by the finding of a skull near Marysville last Saturday. In July, 1926, Miss Olive Pitman, proprietress of Kooringa guest house, disappeared when she left her home, saying that she intended visiting her father's grave in the cemetery. Miss Pitman, then 39 years old, was not in good health, and was not seen again after that day. The skull was found by Mr. K. Elmore, whose attention was drawn to the vicinity by an eagle which appeared to be attacking something. He discovered that the bird's prey was only a rabbit, but nearby he noticed the skull. He also found a piece of steel, which appeared to be part of a corset. The remains of the skeleton were collected by First constable Bentley and sent to Melbourne for examination. Close by were ashes, believed to be the remains of clothing burnt in the bush fires recently. The skull appeared to have been exposed for many years.

APPENDIX III – GWEN'S FATE

Reports of Gwen's tragic death appealed to the tabloids of the time, who treated it in a very melodramatic fashion.

But firstly the report from the Argus 27 Nov 1931

WOMAN SEVERELY BURNED

Miss Gwen Pitman, a former proprietress of Kooringa, a guest house at Marysville, was found at 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon lying unconscious with her clothing burnt, in some bushes, near the house. She had been missing since 11 o'clock, and parties had been, searching for her. First aid was rendered, by Constable H. Anderson and others, and she was removed to the Alexandra Hospital, where she was admitted in a serious condition. It is understood that Miss Pitman was using a kerosene stove when her clothing caught fire.

Sun (Sydney, NSW), 20 December 1931⁷, page 3

Mystery of Woman's Charred Body WAS IT CALLOUS MURDER? SET ALIGHT WITH PETROL IS SUGGESTION PUZZLE FOR POLICE

MELBOURNE, Saturday.— Mystery still surrounds the death of Gwendoline Pitman, a single woman, who was found terribly burned and barely conscious near her home at Marysville last week.

The best brains of the Victorian C.I.B. are working night and day in an attempt to sift the truth from a series of details which combine to make one of the deepest mysteries in the annals of Australian crime. Of a well-connected and well-known Marysville family, Miss Pitman, who was 40, entered into partnership some time ago with an elderly man of artistic tastes. They built a quaint house, which they called "The Log Cabin," and fitted it up as a curiosity shop, combining photography and hairdressing with the sale of curios and works of art. They established a modest trade with tourists. Miss Pitman lived alone in this cabin on the lonely outskirts of Marysville. Her partner made his home elsewhere.

On three occasions in the past 12 months Miss Pitman made attempts to take her own life. A sister, named Olive, vanished into the bush in 1926, and has not been seen or heard of since.

The mother and a brother are alive in Victoria, and, it is stated, they were in communication with her until shortly before her death.

EXPECTED A VISITOR

Miss Pitman was last seen alive by her partner at sunset. She was evidently expecting a visitor at tea or supper, because the table was set for two. Who was the person she was expecting or was entertaining before her death? Had her vanished sister returned? Had she some enemy? Was there a man in her life? Who was responsible for the dreadful tragedy which followed in the dead of that tragic night? She was found early the next day lying in a small clearing on the banks of a stream near her cabin, so shockingly burnt as to be almost unrecognisable.

Her body was blackened by fire from the waist up. Strangely, there was a burn on one leg under an undamaged silk stocking. And her hands were not so badly burned as the rest of her

Would not she have made some attempt to beat out or ward off the flames with her hands?

"THE ONLY WAY"

The left side of the head was almost charred, as though she had lain in a fire. All the hair was gone, and the scalp was burned through.

It appears that her injuries could not have been caused solely by the mere flaming of petrol-soaked clothing.

Still alive when found, Miss Pitman faintly murmured — "Petrol — the only way out" — and lapsed into unconsciousness, from which she did not emerge until just before her death in hospital.

But before she died, It is stated, she made a statement .which contained details so horrible as to be hard to credit. These, it is said, cannot be revealed until the police make certain inquiries.

MYSTERY POINTS

The points to be cleared by the police are: Who removed all clues as to how and where Miss Pitman received her fatal injuries, and how, considering the state in which she was found, did she manage to negotiate the tightly-strained, close-wired fence, and the 20 yards of scrub between the cabin and the clearing in which she was found? Nothing in the home had been disarranged. A little safe, in which she kept her few valuables, was intact. And, to add to the riddle, there was no sign of burning about the house or in the clearing! A Marysville resident states that she heard a car leave the township at high speed about midnight on the night of the tragedy. It is estimated that Miss Pitman must have received her fatal burns about that hour.

Did a man or a woman visit Miss Pitman in a car? Did he or she pour petrol over the unfortunate woman in or near the car, and then carry her, after the flames had subsided, to the clearing in the scrub, abandoning her for dead?

What would be the motive for such a hideous crime? In Miss Pitman's possession was a letter, signed by George Washington, which was a family heirloom.

It was found in her safe after the crime, yet, it is said, the letter played an important part in events leading up to the tragedy.

Why did it?

POLICE RETICENCE

The suicide theory is exploded by the fact that she was found in the clearing, obviously some distance from where she met with her injuries.

Miss Pitman's partner can throw no light on the mystery. He visited the cabin after breakfast, and found Miss Pitman was missing. A search was made, and the unfortunate woman was found. Superintendent Piggott, of the Victorian C.I.B., who has charge of the police investigations, refuses any information before the inquest, which will be held on Tuesday. He understands that Miss Pitman's mother and brother were in Melbourne on the night and the day after the tragedy. They live in South Yarra. The Marysville police also refuse to give any information.

Note:

The "Sunday Sun " artist's conception of the locality of "The Log Cabin," Marysville, where Miss Gwendoline Pitman was found fatally burned has the creek on the right of the cabin when in fact it is on the left.

See copy of original page later in this document.

WOMAN WHO SOUGHT DEATH BY FIRE HUMAN TORCH IN LONELY SCRUB

Soaked Clothing With Petrol and Walked to her Funeral Pyre

TRAGIC CONFESSION BEFORE SHE DIED

(FROM 'TRUTHS' MELBOURNE OFFICE.)

WHAT strange story of queer beliefs lies behind the mystery of the burning woman in the Marysville bush? Here was a cultured and refined woman, member of a well-connected family, an artist, and an extensive reader, as her library indicated, who sought death by fire. It burned and charred her body so that portions of it were unrecognisable.

Dark shapes of ancient deities and the age-old mysteries of Aryan fire worshippers seem to hover about the tragic end of Miss Gwendoline de Burgh Pitman. In times gone by, when death was near, Viking men and Women died gladly amid the flames of their burning ships, happy in the thought that Valhalla awaited them.

In the dim beginnings of the human race, fire was the avenger, the cleanser, the only means of atonement, and the way to a better life. Had some such strange ideas as these hypnotised the receptive mind of the dead woman?

Miss Pitman who was 40 years old, was a great student of the ancient folk and besides eking out a simple living by the aid of photography and hairdressing, was engaged in the manufacture of arts and crafts necessitating a close study of beliefs and habits of other and older lands. She lived alone in a quaint log cabin with the towering blue mass of the Great Dividing Range as an immediate background.

Her behaviour, it has now been shown, had been strange, and an unfortunate mental history, which began years ago, has now been disclosed by the inquest into the dead woman's death which took place last week at Marysville.

For some years she and her sister Olive conducted a well-known guest-house in the locality.

Then one morning Olive walked out of the house, and was never seen again. Although search parties combed and re-combed the ranges and ravines that cover the country, the terrifying wilderness had swallowed her up.

Drenched with Petrol

There are many strange features about this tragedy which has aroused continent-wide interest.

It has been established that when Miss Pitman left her home on the day of the tragedy, nothing in her home was disturbed.

The petrol stove she used to cook her meals on was in order, with the kettle still upon it. There was no sign of fire about the house.

It is now known that, to reach the spot where she was found, close to the little creek that bubbles past the back of her house, she left by a side door, and must have climbed through a wire fence to reach the spot she had marked as a funeral pyre.

It would seem that she had drenched herself with petrol before leaving the house, and then, seeking the bush, had deliberately set fire to the upper portion of her clothing.

With the flames leaping about, and suffering awful anguish, she may have regretted of her terrible deed, for there are indications that she strove to reach the creek, but was overcome before she could.

Although the inquest disclosed that the only words she uttered when it had happened, were—"Petrol it was the only way"—it now transpires that the unfortunate woman did not go to her last resting-place without telling someone the full story of her tragic end.

When the dying woman was lying on her bed in the ward at Alexandra District Hospital, where she had been rushed immediately, she asked for the presence of a minister.

He came in the person of the Rev Geo Ball, Anglican vicar of the district.

As he knelt by her bedside reciting the prayers for the dying, Miss Pitman turned her charred and burnt face towards him and from her scorched lips came the single word. "Confession".

Cleric's Silence

Then she signed to him to come closer and for those others about her to leave. Silently the white-robed sisters and the physician withdrew, leaving her and the clergyman alone.

Into his ear, it is now known, she told the full story of all that happened on that tragic afternoon beneath the blue shadow of the towering ranges.

She was quite conscious and normal in that brief moment, said the clergyman and she made a full and complete confession. Because of the ethics of his cloth and because the State of Victoria has decreed that a clergyman cannot be compelled to divulge the secrets confided to him by way of confession, the Rev. Ball did not come into the grim sitting of the inquest.

Had he done so, and had his calling allowed him to speak, there is little doubt that he

could have thrown a strange and all-revealing light on the mystery of the burning woman in the bush.

Nurse Bolam, told the Court of Miss Pitman's, mental condition.

As it was, the Deputy-Coroner. Mr Barton had to be content with such evidence as was available.

It was, however, sufficient to convince him that Miss Pitman met death at her own hands, and that a verdict of suicide was the only one possible, there being no evidence to connect anyone else with the tragedy, and that an open verdict would be unfair to others.

The inquest was held in the little police office at Marysville, witnesses and police crowding into a room which was darkened by the shadow of the ranges and the mist which eddied about the single window. In two rows on benches the witnesses sat facing one another. The Deputy Coroner sat in a corner of the room, scarcely discernible in the gloom.

Brother's Emotion

Close by leaned the figure of Inspector Piggott, former leading light of the C.I.B., and now assisting the Deputy Coroner to clear up the mystery of Miss Pitman's end.

The name of Newenham M. Pitman is called. Out of the shadows and into the centre of the room there steps a thin faced, nervous man.

He is grey at the temples and his thin, artistic hands tremble violently as he holds the folio from which he reads his statement.

He is the dead woman's brother, and on November 27, the day following her death, he had seen and identified her at the Alexandra Hospital, where she died.

He is questioned closely by Inspector Piggott as to his movements round about the time leading up to his sister's end.

The experienced police officer is seeking to help Pitman through a difficult task. He is in no way antagonistic to the figure in the chair. But deep emotion takes possession of the man, so that at times he has difficulty in following the Inspector. Nevertheless, he finally controls himself and tells his story with occasional promptings from the police officer.

He last saw his sister alive when he visited Marysville on November 23, his evidence ran. He left Melbourne that morning by service car, reaching Marysville at noon.

"I went, up," he said. "to see my sister to explain to her how she stood with regard to an estate which the family has inherited. I left her entirely satisfied with the news that I had legally assigned to her one-quarter of my expected inheritance."

Pitman was visibly affected as he spoke. He went on to tell how he left Marysville the same day at about 3 pm., going back by service car as he came.

He told how his sister visited him and his mother at South Yarra on November 21. It was then, he said, that they gave her a family relic in the shape of a document signed by George Washington. It pleased her very much this gift, said Pitman.

This relic of the past had attracted considerable interest in the case, special significance being attached to its possession, it, however, had little bearing on the affair, and was found locked up securely in the dead woman's safe.

"I was on my way to Marysville by service car on November 27, and heard of my sister's death at Healesville by telephone," he explained.

Was Not Normal

His sister left the same day as she came, said Pitman, and he had never seen her alive since November 23. He had never heard, he said in answer to the Deputy Coroner, of his sister ever threatening to take her life.

Pitman was asked by Piggott what was the object of his visit to Marysville on November 27. He said he had gone there to see his sister because she seemed to disbelieve what he had done for her in regard the arrangement about the estate.

His sister, he explained, further, was not entitled to anything. What had been done was in the nature of a gift to her. He had gone to see her, he said, to assure her that all was well.

Inspector Piggott proceeded to question Pitman about his sister's state of mind. She was not normal. Pitman had to admit, when he last saw her.

He added then that sometime in the past she had attempted to take her own life, but pressed by Piggott as to how often, insisted that it had been only once.

To further questions by Piggott, the grey man in the chair said that another sister had disappeared into the bush and had never been found.

That, however, he agreed was not why he thought his sister Gwen was not quite normal.

"No," he said slowly, "her disturbed state of mind was due to financial matters."

He was then asked about his sister's standing at the bank. "I am quite sure," he said in answer, "that she had no bank balance."

Was she insured? asked Piggott. I believe she was for £51. said Pitman.

One more question was put to Pitman by the inspector. By her death, he asked, would you benefit? Not that I know of, said Pitman, who then, with most of his nervousness gone, rose and merged himself in the shadows with the other witnesses.

Arts and Crafts

Next witness was a kind-faced, soft spoken old gentleman named Peter Mackey.

He is an optician in Melbourne, and he told the Deputy Coroner that the dead

woman had, among other things, been conducting an arts and crafts business in partnership with him at the log cabin at Marysville.

On November 25, he proceeded, he came up to Marysville from Melbourne to see Miss Pitman on business. He spent the afternoon with her, he said, and left the house about 9.30 p.m. on the same day.

Miss Pitman, he went on, was then in good health and appeared normal. "On November 26," he continued, "I went to her house. The back door was open and she was missing."

"I thought she had gone out to take some photographs, and would return later.

"I prepared a cup of tea on an oil stove and left the place."

Mackey went on to relate how he informed Miss Bolam, and subsequently the police that, Miss Pitman was missing.

She had been worrying, he said. In answer to Inspector Piggott, over money and family matters.

Mackey was then questioned by Piggott about Miss Pitman's appearance when he saw her in November.

She gave me a shock, said Mackey. She appeared to have experienced an intense mental ordeal.

He was asked further questions about petrol and said that such fuel was used in the house.

At Mr Piggott's request, Mackey proceeded to describe what he found at the house on the morning of the tragedy. "I went there at 8.30," he said. "The door was open. I set the table for two. The stove was cold, and the kettle had not been boiled, and there was no sign that Miss Pitman had been in the kitchen.

He had no reason, he said, to believe that any person would do Miss Pitman any injury. She was well liked and a very fine woman, he added.

Nurse E. H. Bolam, guest house proprietress and registered trained nurse, residing in Marysville, told how she was informed about 10.16 on the morning of November 26 that Miss Pitman was missing.

She went on to say that she was present with others when the unfortunate lady was found.

"It was on the bank of the creek, about one hundred yards distant from Miss Pitman's house," she said.

"Miss Pitman was badly burnt about the face, head and body. Her clothes were burnt off to the waist. She was semi-conscious and was removed to her own house on a stretcher.

I said to her, "How did it happen?" She replied, "Petrol," in a low voice, and I then

said, "Can you tell me anymore?" She said, "It was the only way out."

Nurse Bolam said that she accompanied Miss Pitman to the hospital at Alexandra, but the dying woman did not speak again on the 40- mile journey.

Nurse Bolam, in answer to Inspector Piggott, said she had known Miss Pitman for 14 years. On November 22, 23 and 24 last, she said, Miss Pitman stayed at her place and was highly strung and in a nervous condition.

"At my request, her brother came to my house to see his sister," she proceeded, "and Miss Pitman would speak to him only in the presence of myself and Mr. F. Barton."

Nurse Bolam went on to say that Miss Pitman and her brother had a conversation over money matters, and when Mr Pitman left that day both he and his sister were on friendly terms.

Nurse Bolam was then asked by Inspector Piggott if Miss Pitman had ever threatened to take her own life.

"No." said the nurse, "but about five years ago she tried to poison herself, and I was called to the scene and saved her life. Afterwards she went to a mental home for six months."

Evidence was given by Dr. Gilbert Gocher that he examined Miss Pitman at Alexandra Hospital. She was suffering, he said, from a severe state of shock.

There was extensive burning of the upper part of the body and back. Miss Pitman's face was badly burnt, he said, the left side being badly charred.

Sister Mary Frances Byrne, who helped dress Miss Pitman's burns, said she asked the dying woman how it had all happened. Miss Pitman merely replied in a low voice, "Don't ask me," and then, when asked what caused the terrible injuries, offered the one word, "Petrol."

Constable Anderson, who was among those who found Miss Pitman in the scrub, said he examined Miss Pitman, but could find no marks of violence upon her, or anything else that suggested foul play.

No other person, he said, occupied the house used by Miss Pitman. Nothing had been disturbed in the place, and he made a search and discovered petrol and methylated spirits. There was also, he said, an empty bottle which had contained petrol, and a tin filler with a tap containing a quantity of petrol.

The Deputy Coroner announced that Miss Pitman died at the hospital at Alexandra from burns caused by her own hand, and that such burns were brought about by setting fire to herself, and that at the time she was mentally afflicted.

APPENDIX IV NEWENHAM PITMAN

Newenham Mueller Pitman married Olivia Birch in 1902 and they had a daughter Constance May Pitman the next year. Electoral rolls show that they were living apart from the time of Constance birth and it appears the marriage failed. Olivia's sister, Mabel raised Constance from infancy, with Constance taking the name Shugg⁸. Mabel and her husband moved to live in Western Australia from the turn of the century. Constance married Edmond Vivian Kelso in Williams, WA in 1927⁹.

Newenham next appears in the 1910s in Fremantle, without Olive, and is back in Melbourne by 1925. Later in life he was with his mother and in touch with his sister as evidenced in the inquest of Gwen.

The Age 7 Sep 1933

A PARTNER'S SUICIDE.

Due to Financial Worries. An inquiry was held by the City Coroner (Mr. D. Grant) regarding the death of Newnham Mueller Pitman, 53 years, secretary of the Minerva Metal Products (A'sia) Pty. Ltd., Spencer-street, West. Melbourne, who was found dead in the office of the company on 28th August with a bullet wound in his head. Richard Fishwick, manager, said deceased was a partner in the company in with witness and Mr. Norman Bennett. Witness last saw him alive at 12.15 p.m. on 20th August, when he left the office. He then appeared to be in good spirits, although he looked very worried. About a week before deceased had told witness he was- very worried financially, and that if things did not improve he would do away with himself. Witness replied, "Don't be absurd." Deceased had put about £2000 into their concern, and arrangements were proceeding for the raising of -additional capital. Norman Bennett, engineer, Edmund street, Balwyn. said that when he arrived at the office on Monday, 28th August, he noticed that the trap door was fastened on the inside, and that a piece of iron had been placed against it. When witness last saw deceased on 20th August he appeared to be in good spirits. He had often spoken about financial troubles, and about three weeks before he said that sooner than go through the Insolvency Court he would blow out his brains. Witness knew deceased had been worried over financial matters in respect to their firm, but witness had not thought he would carry out his threat. Plain-clothes Constable Sloan said deceased left his home at Royal-avenue, Sandringham, at 7 a.m. on Saturday, 26th August, and did not return. The pistol found in the office after, the discovery of the body was unregistered. A verdict of suicide was recorded.

*Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian,
11 Nov 1933*

Ill-fated Family

Newenham Mueller Pitman, whose will has been lodged for probate, was the third of his family to die in tragic circumstances. He was found shot dead in his city office in August, and the Coroner returned a finding of suicide, due to business worries. His will was made on November 11, 1931, shortly before his sister, Miss Gwendolyn De Burgh Pitman, was found fatally burned near her home at Marysville. In 1929 another sister wandered into the bush at Marysville and was never seen again. Pitman left estate valued at £3204 and directed that it be divided between his sister Gwendolyn and a life-long friend and, in the event of either pre-deceasing him, her share to go to a married sister, Persse -Rosalind Stringer, of Hawthorn.

APPENDIX V WASHINGTON LETTER

Caroline Anna nee Newenham was from a famous Irish family. Her great grandfather Sir Edmund Newenham, a politician in Dublin had corresponded with Sir George Washington and also Benjamin Franklin. Caroline had at least one of these letters¹⁰ in her possession and so in 1925-

"A party of sixteen, with officers from the American Fleet, paid an impromptu visit to "Kooringa," Marysville, on Sunday. They expressed their pleasure at their reception and their warm appreciation of the place and surrounding scenery. They were interested in a letter from General George Washington to Sir Edward Newenham (great grandfather of Mrs. Clarence Pitman), introducing Mrs. Montgomerie, widow of General Montgomerie, whose name is immortal."

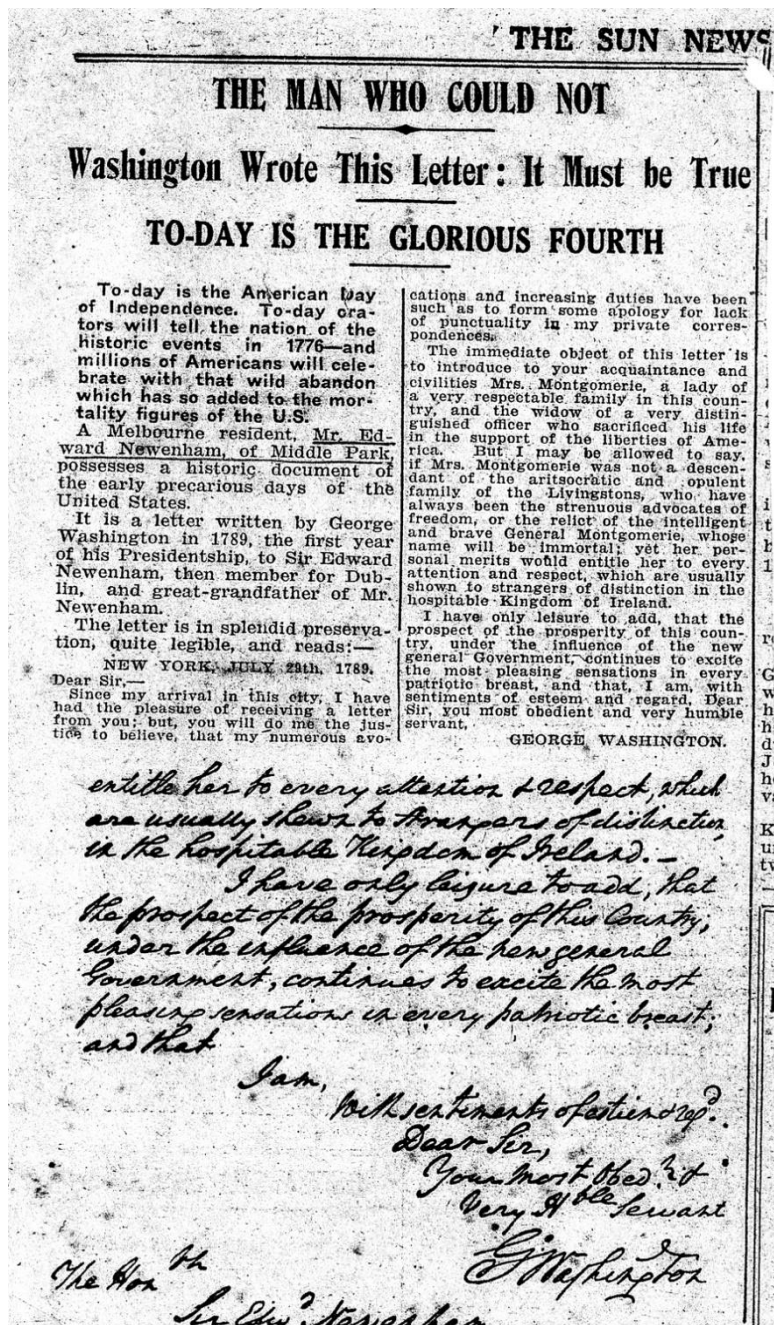
Table Talk 6 Aug 1925 page 17

This letter travelled the world, initially sent from Newburgh, NY to Ireland, then was sent to France for a Grandson, but because of the Napoleonic War no mail was getting through.

It was sent back to Ireland, then it may have gone back to France and or Ireland just before landing in the Jersey Islands.

It turned up in Australia in 1856 aboard one of Sir Edwards other Grandsons. It was passed down to a son who advertised it and it is believed a collector bought it and gave it to back to the USA, where it resides in a Library today.¹¹

The letter from George Washington to Sir Edward Newenham was a prize possession of the family featuring in the death of Gwendoline.



NEWENHAM UNCLES

Argus 13 March 1897, page 4

Extract from an article "Deeds that won the Empire" second series by Vedette

Mrs. Clarence Pitman of Beaconsfield parade,
Sends a page of her family record.

An uncle, William Persse Newenham, was a middy of 15 on board the Cleopatra in the fight with the Ville de Milan—a very gallant action. Another uncle was an ensign in the 4th at Waterloo; another uncle, a naval officer, played a gallant part in the operations at Toulon in 1793, where he was killed; a third uncle was an ensign of the 9th, and took part in an expedition to Heligoland. Yet another uncle was an ensign of the 4th at Waterloo. Here is part of the letter in which he describes the great struggle: —

"We were exposed for eight hours to the Most dreadful fire of shot, shell, grape shot, &c., ever witnessed by the oldest soldier. The French fought with desperation. Their cavalry were in clouds. They renewed their attacks on our infantry ten times, but we remained steady as rocks in hollow squares, with our front ranks kneeling, their bayonets fixed, pointing to the breasts of the horses. No human being can form an idea of the horrid and most bloody scene but those who were on the field. I walked over the bloody field early in the morning

after the battle, and gave ease to many by putting coats under their heads for pillows, &c. The cries of the wounded would melt a flint, let alone the heart of man. So dreadful was the scene that you can have no idea of it; legs, arms, headless bodies lying about in all directions: less bodies lying about in all directions: Frenchmen begging for God's sake to raise their heads that they might die easy. During the fight I was much exposed, being so tall and had a narrow escape from losing my right leg and thigh, as a piece of shell struck a five franc piece in my pocket." Another relative of Mrs. Pitman's served in India at the close of the last century. "We have in our possession" writes Mrs. Pitman, "an ivory-mounted pistol, richly carved, belonging to Tippoo Sahib and which was taken at Seringapatam. Tippoo fell just inside the gate, mortally wounded. A private soldier tried to take off his sash, or some other richly ornamented accoutrement; the Sultan wounded him by a stroke of his sabre, whereupon the soldier despatched him with his bayonet, and took the coveted prize. Very soon after, Ensign Newenham arrived on the spot, and picked up the pistol from the ground, close to Tippoo Sahib's side. "There must have been a pair of these pistols," writes Mrs. Pitman, "for a similar one belonged, some years ago, and may still belong, to Mr. Degraives, of Melbourne."

¹ Melbourne Punch 22 July 1897

² Marriage Reg No 1405

³ Electoral Roll for 1917

⁴ Electoral Roll 1918

⁵ Various newspaper reports.

⁶ Note received from Thomas' son Gerald. Thomas Branchflower was registered in Marysville on the 1931 Electoral Roll.

⁷ 1931 was during the Depression. Did this play a part in Gwen's money worries?

⁸ Wedding notice Kelso-Shugg

⁹ From grandson T Barker

¹⁰ The original was sold to the collector and the family had a copy on a photographic glass. There are also two different handwritten transcriptions.

¹¹ From Brett Fitzgerald, Newenham descendant.