



*James*

## *Ruse*

### **News from the St. Tudy History Group Research Team ...**

This month I am not going to be writing about St. Tudy – or am I? Jenny Muir kindly gave me an article on a man called James Ruse (Rouse/Roose), an Australian convict.

Growing up in Australia, I used to visit a family friend in Parramatta, New South Wales, unaware of this story. Few people played as large a part in Australia's farming history and survival as a colony, as James Ruse. He was born on the 9th August 1759, at Lawhitton, Launceston. James was convicted at Bodmin Assizes in 1782 for the theft of two silver watches, value £5.00, and sentenced to death. The death penalty was reprieved, and James was sent to Australia for seven years instead. After serving five years on a hulk ship that was used as a prison with unbearable conditions, he sailed on one of the first fleet, arriving in New South Wales in January 1788 with 18 months of his sentence remaining.

As the supplies that the first fleet had bought with them dwindled, it became apparent that the colony of Sydney needed to grow its own food or starve. In November 1788 Governor Arthur Phillip chose James, still a convict, to go to Parramatta, west of Sydney, to try and succeed at farming. One of Governor Phillip's senior officers was Lieutenant Phillip Gidley King, a Cornishman born in Launceston. He probably recommended James, as the Ruse family had been farmers in the Launceston area and he may have known of them. Whilst the Government had made a poor job in the past, James showed them how to do a "proper job". He was given six and a half acres, seed, two sows, six hens, implements, and was fed and clothed from the public stores for 15 months. The temperature averaged around 30-35 degrees. If he succeeded he would be granted 30 acres of his own. His methods of cultivation were primitive, but more effective than those tried previously. In February 1791 James announced that he and his wife, were self sufficient! His property was called "Experiment Farm" and he was the first convict turned farmer to be deeded the first ever land grant in Australia.

In 1793 James was now a free man, he sold his farm to John Harris a Surgeon and Naval Officer who arrived in the Second Fleet to Australia. Ironically, Harris was a Magistrate and Supervisor of the Police Force! In 1807 Harris was dismissed as a Naval Officer by guess who – our old friend Captain Bligh, Governor of New South Wales. This led to Harris becoming a bitter opponent to Bligh, stating "I have heard much said of Bounty Bligh before I saw him, but no person could conceive that he could be such a fellow ... Caligula himself never reigned with more despotic sway than he does, it is completely a reign of terror". Harris was re-instated in 1808 but resigned in 1814, when he became a private farmer, landowner, and helped to establish the Bank of New South Wales.

James died on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1837, his 47<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary with Elizabeth. He carved his own tombstone which said "Native of Cornwall and arrived in this colony by the First Fleet" "My mother reread (reared) me tenderley, With me she took much paines, and when I arrived in this coelney (colony) I sowed the forst (first) grains, And now with my heavenly father I hope for ever to remain". Today, his original deeded land and the house that John Harris built on it is a museum, and owned by the Nation Trust and located at Ruse Street, Harris Park. James has key locations named after him including The James Ruse Agricultural High School, and a suburb in Sydney called Ruse. Well done James Ruse, a lad from Cornwall - you showed them how to do a "proper job"!

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