JAMES OLD

1. [**St Mawgan in Pydar**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=9BF87871-BF1F-4DB9-B695-76B9869C169F)

James was the fifth son of Richard Old & Jane Liddicoat. He was christened on the 19th June, 1831 at St Mawgan in Pydar, Cornwall, and was 12 when the family decided to emigrate to New Zealand. They arrived on the ship 'Essex' on the 20th January, 1843 and James first worked as a labourer, clearing the bush around the settlement of New Plymouth

1. [**St Mary’s Church**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=D4657A56-3A69-48FD-8B1C-C31994B379EB)

As far as we can ascertain, James married Betsy Rickard Wills on the 20th May 1854 at St Mary’s Anglican Church in New Plymouth. Some researchers say they married in Bell Block, but the Anglican Church was not completed there until 1857.

Betsy was born in Tamerton Foliot, Plymouth, England in 1837, the youngest daughter of James & Betsy Wills. The Wills family had arrived in New Plymouth, on the ship 'Timandra.' James' brother, Robert Old, married Betsy's sister, Maria Williams Wills.

Between 1855 and 1866 James and Betsy had 7 children.

1. [**Map showing Bell Block**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=60CF6D48-0EB1-47A0-8E2F-B2662C95272D)

Between 1855 and 1857 James Old is recorded on Jury Lists as being a Labourer living in Bell Block.

Unfortunately this wasn’t a good place for settlers to be at this time. Violent clashes over land sales occurred between divisions within the Puketapu [hapū](https://teara.govt.nz/en/glossary#hapū) at Bell Block during the 1850s. This alarmed many Pākehā settlers, and as a result of their submissions, British troops arrived in New Plymouth in 1855 and the first Taranaki war began on 17 March 1860.

The sale of the Bell Block land divided the Puketapu people. Whilst Rawiri Waiaua, chief of the Hua division of the Puketapu hapu was happy to sell land to the Pakeha, chief Katatore was not.

Katatore had Rawiri Waiaua shot and killed, plunging Maori into civil war until the area around the Bell Block became a bloody battlefield.

1. [**Maori Wars**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=C49FB682-0A9A-4C57-9074-E11AE65A03A9)

This image from Taranaki’s history depicts Maori preparing for war using Muskets.

The period 1858–59 was one of continual strife in the district of Bell Block. The following description of the fighting at the Bell Block is from the pen of Mr. [A. H. Messenger](http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/name-125127.html), son of the late Colonel [W. B. Messenger](http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/name-125128.html), of New Plymouth:—

“Some curious incidents occurred in the native war waged over the newly made farms of the settlers from Devon and Cornwall. As a boy living in one of the Taranaki frontier posts, I heard the story of those stirring times recounted by my father.

The opposing tribes fought back and forth with varying fortune over the undulating country of the Waiwhakaiho River, and out on to what was later known as the Bell Block. The settlers in 1857–58 were witnesses of many thrilling incidents, and it was a frequent occurrence to have to stop work in the middle of a fencing or ploughing job and retire to the security of the farmhouse while a fierce skirmish took place in which numerous casualties occurred on both sides.

Though bullets were flying in all directions, the white settlers were never molested, and their stock also was under strict *tapu,* and was not interfered with.

An episode typical of those thrilling days was described by a Devonshire settler who in the midst of ploughing operations suddenly found himself in a Maori battle. The opposing war-parties had skirmished up towards one another through the high fern surrounding the little farm, and finished up with a charge and close hand-to-hand fighting with tomahawk and *mere* over the newly ploughed ground.

For a moment the settler thought that his end had come, but the brown warriors took no notice of his presence, and as the battle passed on he found himself still standing, hand on plough, gazing in bewilderment at several stark figures that lay sprawled in the attitude of sudden death amid the newly turned furrows.

As night fell groups of warriors, many of whom bore fresh wounds from musket-ball or blow of tomahawk, gathered round the nearest farmhouse and deposited their guns with the white settlers, telling them that they would call for them on the morrow, when fighting was resumed in the same manner.”

“In another case a settler received a message from each of the opposing forces to the effect that a fight would take place on his farm in the morning, and that it would be well for him to remain in his house until the tide of war had passed by. Taking due heed of this warning, the settler was witness on the following morning of a battle in his pastures. Many bullets struck the house, and one random shot killed a sheep; otherwise no damage was done to his property. The nervous tension brought on by these conditions of life proved too much for several of the settlers, who finally left the district in search of more peaceful surroundings.”

1. [**Nelson**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=CF55B19D-2083-4B14-A71A-CFE26D71A4AA)

Is it any wonder that Betsy wanted to leave the area!

Betsy and their 7 children went to Nelson for the duration of the Taranaki Wars (which commenced in 1860). Whilst there she had an affair with George Newton, which resulted in a child, Louisa Maud Newton, being born on September 17 1867.

Betsy died aged 33 on the 20th June 1870 from cancer of the womb, in Blenheim.

Louisa was aged 3 at the time and was adopted out and renamed Mary Ann Carvell. The child was formally adopted by Eli & Rebecca Carvell on 21st May, 1871. The father of the child was registered as George Newton.

Although no marriage date has been found for Betsy Old and George Newton, she was buried under the surname Newton in the Blenheim Cemetery.

1. [**James Old Death report**](http://www.famnet.org.nz/docs_pages_NoReg/DocsGeneral.aspx?DOCid=261564BE-C11E-4B82-B38C-4EF04C97D9B1)

James was found drowned in the Wanganui River on the 20th February, 1882. The Newspaper reported that his body had been noticed in shallow water and Police arranged for it to be recovered. It was found to be the body of a man about 60 years of age, dressed in a black coat and light trousers. He was recognised as James Old, brother of Mr John Old, a farmer, No. 2 Line. James Old was for many years servant to Mr Shield, but for some time had been labouring about at different places. The body could not have been in the water more than days, and it is supposed the poor fellow must have fallen in.

The inquest found he had been dead 5 days. He is buried in the Old Wanganui Cemetery, in Wanganui, location unknown.

1. **Slide: James Old 1831 – 1882**

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