

An Investigation of Historical Evidence Regarding the Remnant Stone Bridge, Pyes Creek, Castle Hill

For Hornsby Shire Council

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Abbreviations

C T	Certificate of Title
DP	Deposited Plan
LPI	Land and Property Information
SRNSW	State Records of New South Wales

1.0 Introduction

This study was commissioned by Hornsby Shire Council to assist an archaeological investigation and stabilisation project for the remains of a stone bridge on the former alignment of the Great North Road constructed by convict labour.

The major issue regarding this bridge was whether this bridge was built on the original line of the Great North Road or whether it was built on part of a new line of that Road constructed soon after the original line was completed. This can only be determined by examining a range of evidence, much of which does not directly relate to the bridge itself.

2.0 Evidence for the Bridge at Pyes Creek

The remnant bridge at Pyes Creek is located near Woodlark Place, Castle Hill. The land was originally part of a grant of 60 acres to James Pye dated 13 September 1819 bounded on the west by Thomas Pye and on the south by Garraty and Murphy.¹ This grant was later numbered as Portion 245.²

Early Crown Plans were checked to see if there was any data regarding these roads. The charting map of the Parish catalogued as N.425.or showed Portion 245 Parish South Colah granted to James Pye with only the boundaries shown. The line of road R.882.1603 was later added to the map.³ An amended version of the same map catalogued as N.2.425 showed the portions but no legible details.⁴ The early charting map F.489.or also showed no details of value.⁵

In September 1825, surveyor Heneage Finch surveyed the original line of the Great North Road, which was planned to connect the County of Cumberland with the growing Hunter region and places to the north. His survey traced the line as far north as Wiseman's property on the Hawkesbury River.⁶ Finch's map does not include enough detail of the grants over which it passed to permit precise location of the land over which the road would pass.⁷

Finch's line was altered by Surveyor-General, Thomas L Mitchell as well as during construction.⁸ Construction appears to have commenced in September 1826 when two road gangs were set to work at 'Castle Hill North'.⁹

¹ Grant Register, Vol 3, 1816-22, SRNSW 7/448, p 47, No 113

² RPA 7160

³ N.425or, now 1-N425, Crown Plan

⁴ N.2.425, Crown Plan

⁵ F.489.or. Crown Plan

⁶ Grace Karskens, *The Grandest Improvement in the Country: An Historical and Archaeological Study of the Great North Road, NSW, 1825-1836*, MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1985, p 45

⁷ Plan of proposed road northerly from 19 mile stone, Windsor Road, towards Hunter River (R.492), H Finch 1825, S R Map 4987A & 4987B

⁸ Grace Karskens, *Grandest Monument*, p 48

⁹ Grace Karskens, *Grandest Monument*, p 81

On 27 August 1828, it was announced that the Great North Road would receive a new direction. Three road gangs had already been placed on 'a new line from Billy Blue's on the North Shore, opposite Sydney, by which the road will be shortened twenty miles'.¹ This became the New Line Road on which this bridge is situated. There is little information about this road and any bridges on it.

However, surveyor William Romaine Govett had been instructed to survey the dividing range between Berowra and Cowan. The completed plan sent in on 14 August 1829 also showed the 'road ... from Parramatta River to Wiseman's Rd lately laid out by Major Lockyer'. Govett's map showed how the road turned in a south-westerly direction to cross an unnamed creek, which equates to Pyes Creek.² The map is only dated as '1829' on the face of the map but Govett's letter of 14 August 1829 equates to this map.³ Unfortunately, his letter provided no details about the road. It is significant that the alignment and position shown by Govett is directly mirrored in the parish map dated as 27 March 1835 that shows two lines of road. It is notable that the position of the unnamed creek (Pyes Creek) is shown on the 1835 parish map and readily equates to where the road on Govett's map crosses an unnamed creek. The northerly road later formed the line on which the current New Line Road was later positioned, with some minor alterations. The southern line of road on Govett's map is where the stone bridge is located. The northern line of road is not shown on Govett's map confirming it was not the 'road ... from Parramatta River to Wiseman's Rd lately laid out by Major Lockyer'. It may have been a local road or it may have been a new line of the Great North Road laid out soon after Govett completed his survey.

¹ *Australian*, 27 Aug 1828, p 3

² SR Map 5002

³ 14 Aug 1829, Surveyor-General, Letters Received from Surveyors, W R Govett, SRNSW 2/1541.1



**Figure 1 W R Govett's survey of the ranges showed the Great North Road. Note the bend to the south-west it makes to cross what was later named as Pyes Creek.
Source: SR Map 5002**



Figure 2 The complete map of the ranges surveyed by Govett. Source: SR Map 5002

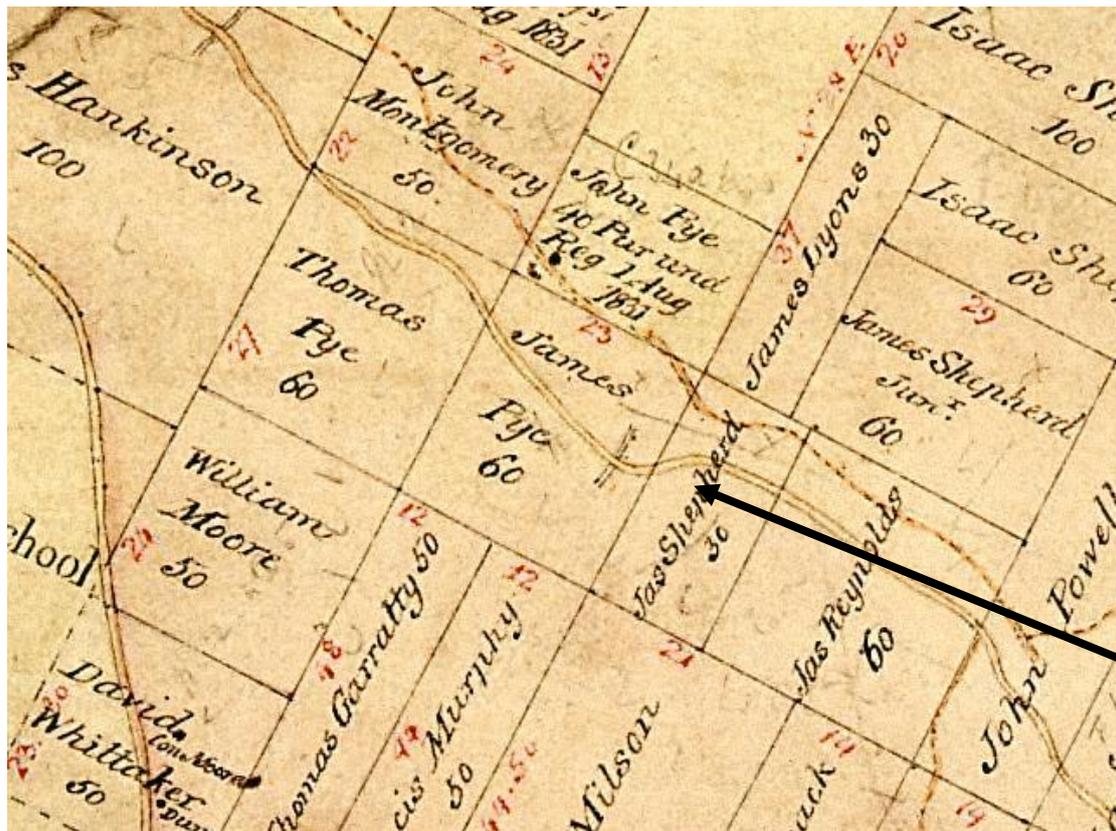


Figure 3 The 1835 edition of the parish map of South Colah showed the Great North Road as the southern line of road bisecting James Pye's 60-acre grant. Note the turn to the south-west in the road to cross the creek [now Pyes Creek], which is also shown. Source: Parish Map, Parish South Colah, County Cumberland, 1835

These maps strongly support the conclusion that the southern line of road, which crosses Pye's Creek at the bridge that is the subject of this study, was the original alignment of the New Line Road.

Thus, the southern line of road appears to have been the original line.

However, a contrary piece of evidence needs to be considered.

On 1 November 1830, John Pye wrote to the government complaining that 'a short time ago a new line of Road' was completed under Major Lockyer which bisected John Montgomery's grant of 50 acres (Portion 251). Pye had bought that land some years before. Pye requested a grant of the land to the north since the new road cut off the northern part of Montgomery's grant from access to water. On 2 December 1830, Surveyor-General T L Mitchell confirmed these details.¹ This letter implies the north road was the road on a new alignment. Lockyer's appointment as Roads Superintendent had ended in December 1829, implying that the road across

¹ 30/8581, in Colonial Secretary, Letters Received re Land Matters, John Pye file, SRNSW 2/7953

Montgomery's grant would have been completed between August and December 1829.¹

The equation of Govett's map with the southern line of road on the 1835 parish map is strong evidence that it was the original line. The road cutting across Montgomery's grant (Portion 251) appears to be a new line of road cut by the road gang. The road gangs returned to areas previously worked on, as shown by Grace Karskens in her thesis.²

The relevant road gang reports are not extant for the relevant months of 1829. Road Gang 34 under overseer David Frew was working on the New Line of road to Dural from January 1830 to early May 1830.³ At the same time, a Bridge party under William Lynne and later under Michael Dollard was working on the same roads. On 9 January 1830, the bridge party was at Kissing Point, at Dural on 13 January, then at Kissing Point again on 16 and 23 January. Then from 27 January until 10 April the party was near Dural, after which it seems to be out of the area.⁴ It is possible the bridge may have been built at that time, if it had not been built earlier.

James Pye does not appear to have made any significant use of the land in Portion 245. On 4 and 5 February 1831, by a deed of Lease and release, he sold it to John Pye.⁵ This deed was listed in the Real Property Application when this land was converted to Torrens Title in 1887. However, the deed was not registered. The Search Notes for this Real Property Application at LPI show the official searchers could not find a registered copy of the deed either. Nevertheless, the title was accepted as correct and a Torrens Title certificate was issued confirming that the transaction was legitimate.

Another relevant plan was a portion survey by Surveyor Felton Mathew. On 7 May 1832, he sent in a plan of three portions in the Parish of South Colah. A 40-acre portion (later Portion 113) measured for Thomas Wilkinson north-east of James Pye's 60-acre portion (Portion 245) showed a road across its easternmost point also passing across James Pye's land. Another section of the same road was shown on John Montgomery's land (Portion 251) following the current line of the New Line Road. Another road was shown to the south of it across Thomas Pye's 60 acres (Portion 250), which was the road on which the Pye's Creek bridge was located. The road from the easternmost corner of Pye's 60 acres across Wilkinson's land was shown as joining with the road across Montgomery's land.⁶ Crucially, the northern line of road is only dotted in and is not shown with a straight line, implying it was a lesser or non-official road.

¹ 'E Lockyer (1784-1860)', *ADB*, volume 2, p 123; *Australian*, 9 Dec 1829, p 3

² Grace Karskens, *Grandest Monument*, p 48

³ Surveyor of Roads and Bridges, *Weekly and Monthly Road Gang Reports, 1827-30*, SRNSW 9/2689

⁴ Surveyor of Roads and Bridges, *Weekly and Monthly Road Gang Reports, 1827-30*, SRNSW 9/2689

⁵ RPA 7160

⁶ C.34.690, Crown Plan

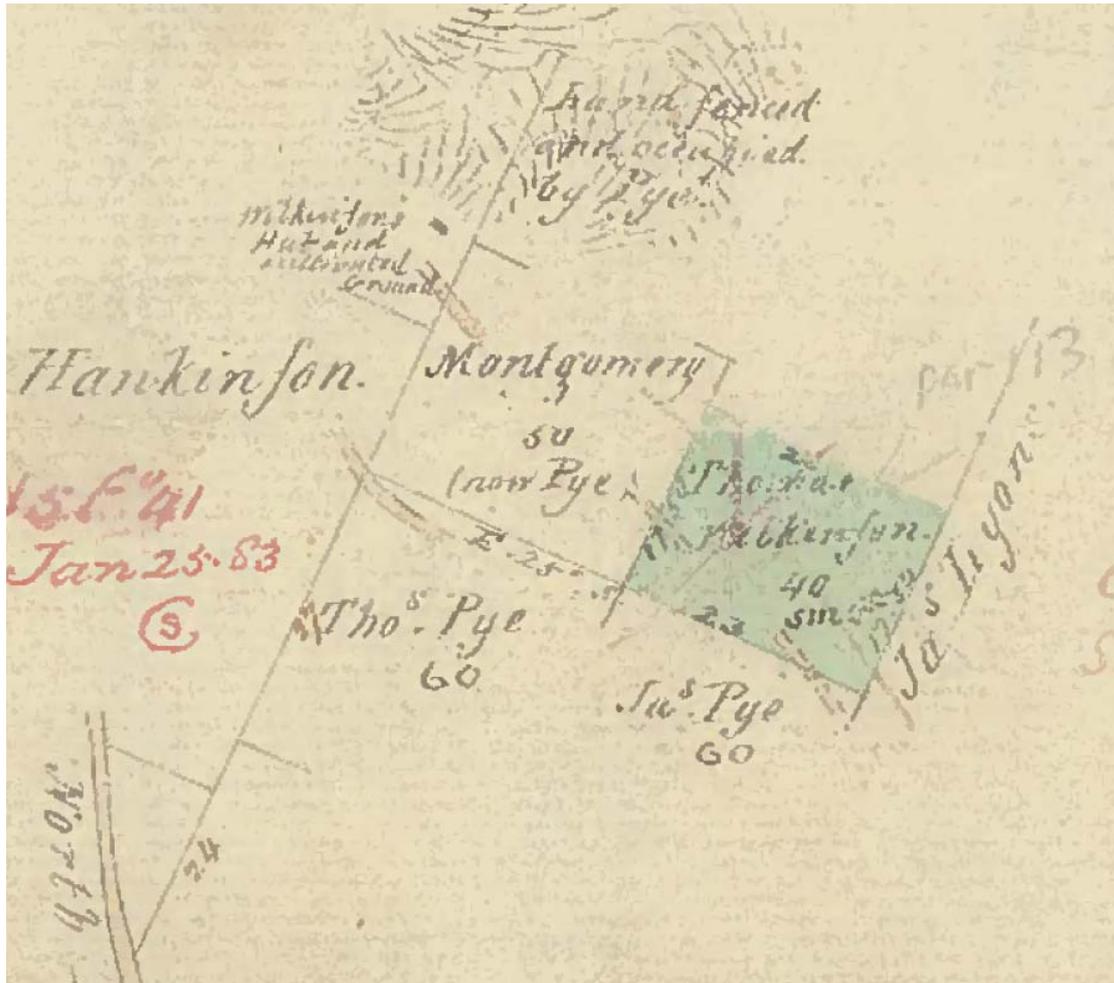


Figure 4 Felton Mathew's original plan of the portion north-east of James Pye's 60 acres showed the original line of the Great North Road to the south with solid lines and the other road to the north only with dotted lines. Source: C.34.690, Crown Plan

Felton Mathew's Fieldbook dated 4 May 1832 showed the road running diagonally across Portion 113 but not the southern road across Thomas Pye's 60 acres (Portion 250).¹

¹ Surveyor-General, Surveyors' Fieldbook, No 381, F Mathew, SRNSW 2/5006, p 40

The land that became Portion 113 had been measured for Wilkinson in error. A revised version of this Crown Plan to correct the alienation of Portion 113 to its correct purchaser, John Pye, showed similar detail though the detail was partially obscured by the charting of the alignment of R.5340a.1603 across the later line of the New Line Road to the north.¹

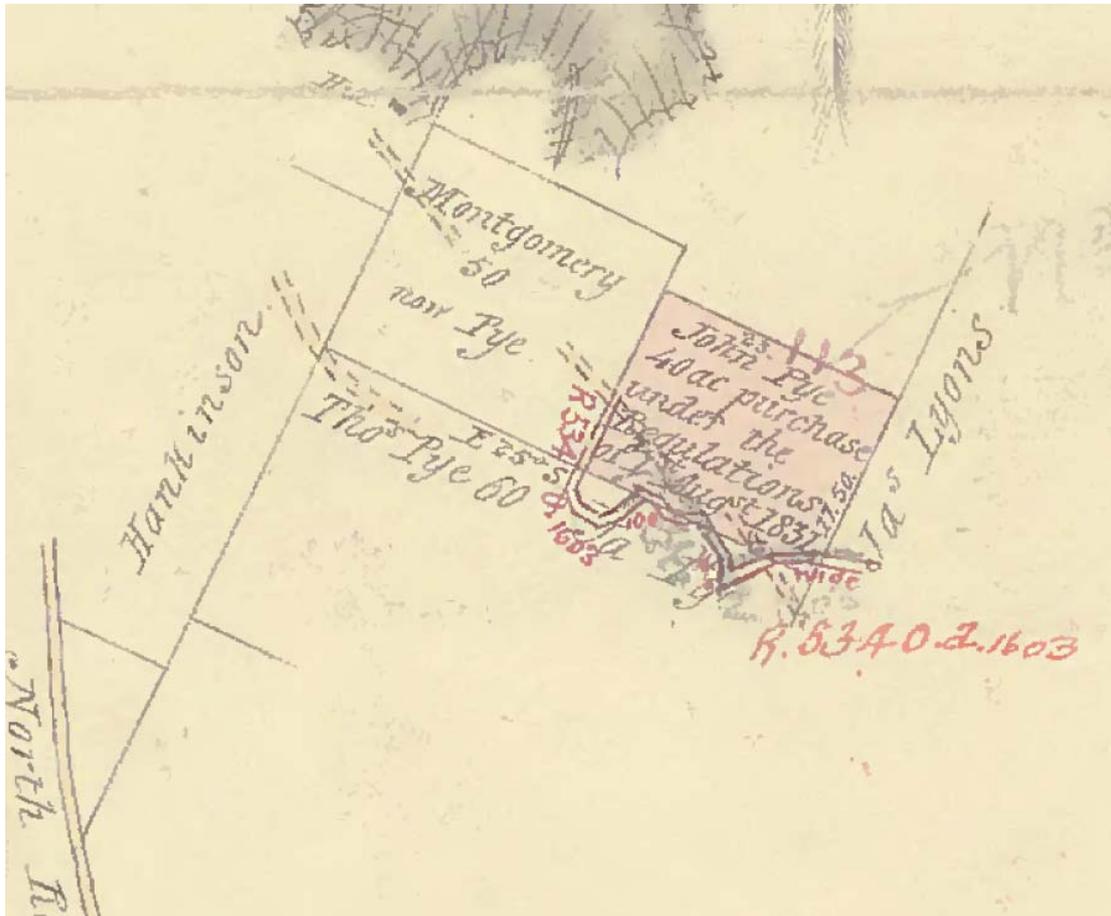


Figure 2 Felton Mathew's final plan of Portion 113 only showed the northern road but it was still shown with dotted lines signifying it was not an official road. To further confuse the issue, on this map, the southern road is also shown with dotted lines. Source: C.34a.690, Crown Plan

No letters regarding these surveys were found in Mathew's correspondence to the Surveyor-General.²

The 1833 *NSW Directory* included a Road Itinerary, which listed the New Line Road. It showed the following for this part of the road:

- 17 Cross the Pennant hill road at miles 2 1/2
- Bridge across small creek.
- 19 1/2 Creek 2 1/2

¹ C.34a.690, Crown Plan

² Surveyor-General, Letters Received from Surveyors, F Mathew, SRNSW 2/1558A

20 1/4 Creek 3/4.¹

The following piece of evidence is the parish map of South Colah dated as 27 March 1835, which showed the original southern alignment of the road, which crossed Pyes Creek shown with straight lines, plus the other alignment to the north shown with dotted lines. Crucially, the northern line of road is only dotted in and is not shown with a straight line, implying it was a lesser or non-official road. This has been dealt with above in relation to Govett's map of 1829.

Another slightly less reliable source is a copy of the parish map of South Colah, probably made by surveyor P L Bemi about 1834. His map showed the line of road as running across James Pye's grant, with no sign of the later line of road to the north. Yet, the line of the road on his map appears to combine parts of the line of both the northern and southern roads. It matches the southern road where his road passes through James Pye's Portion 245 but seems to follow the northern line where the road passes through John Montgomery's Portion 251.²



Figure 3 A copy of the South Colah parish map completed by P L Bemi combined details of the northern and southern roads. Source: P L Bemi [?], Ph of South Colah, Sydney, nd 1834?, ML Map Z/M2 811.147/1899/1

¹ *New South Wales Calendar and General Post Office directory, 1833*, compiled by James Raymond, Stephens & Stokes, Sydney, p 80

² P L Bemi [?], Ph of South Colah, Sydney, nd 1834?, ML Map Z/M2 811.147/1899/1

Other evidence was checked in an attempt to locate more data about the road or about this part of the land owned by the Pye family. No letters from James Pye or John Pye relating to this land or the roads were found in either the Colonial Secretary's letters received or in those received by the Surveyor-General.¹ Similarly, a search of the newspapers from 1828 to 1835 revealed nothing of relevance either.²

James Pye's 60-acre grant (Portion 245) was devised by will to Mary Elizabeth Jenner, wife of Samuel Jenner, of Parramatta, gentleman, who was also recorded as a farmer of Baulkham Hills. On 17 February 1854, they leased six Portions of land to John Purchase, timber merchant of Parramatta, including Portion 245. The land leased was described as bounded on the south-east by John Purchase, Mr Shepherd [Portion 244] and Mr Milson [Portion 243] and on the south-west partly by a road leading out of the Dural Road to Pennant Hills, Mr Garratty [Portion 247] and Mr Moore [Portion 249]. The lease included 'all Timber and other trees' along with the right to cut them and cart them away and 'to have free and uninterrupted ingress, egress and regress to the said several pieces of land and farms from the road leading from Cross Roads to Dural' [i.e. from New Line Road].³ The road mentioned along the south-west boundary does not appear to be the former line of the New Line Road but what is now Moore Road.

Surveyor E J H Knapp completed a road survey of a revised alignment of New Line Road on 31 August 1869. The old road, i.e. the original line of the Great North Road to the south, was not shown.⁴ This may imply it had fallen into disuse. The new alignment of the road R.882.1603 was officially confirmed on 27 May 1870.⁵ Attempts to locate the relevant correspondence about this road in case there was any information about the old road to the south proved abortive since the files were not in the relevant boxes.⁶

¹ Joan Reese's index to the Colonial Secretary's letters received was checked for this period as well as the Surveyor-General's index and the box Surveyor-General, Correspondence from Individuals, P 1822-33, SRNSW 2/1699

² TROVE search of newspapers 1828-1840 under a variety of likely

³ Old System Deed, No 70 Bk 30, LPI

⁴ R.882.1603, Crown Plan

⁵ NSWGG, 27 May 1870, p 1186

⁶ Lands, Roads Branch, Correspondence, At Rds70/1274, SRNSW 10/15043; Rds70/1701, SRNSW 10/15043



Figure 4 E J H Knapp's survey of 31 August 1869 of a revised alignment of the road to the north that had become the main road showed no detail of the original Great North Road to the south. Source: R.882.1603, Crown Plan

The edition of the parish map of South Colah dated as 13 November 1883 showed both alignments of the New Line Road but the alignment to the north is filled in with firm lines to the western boundary of John Pye's 40 acres (later Portion 113).

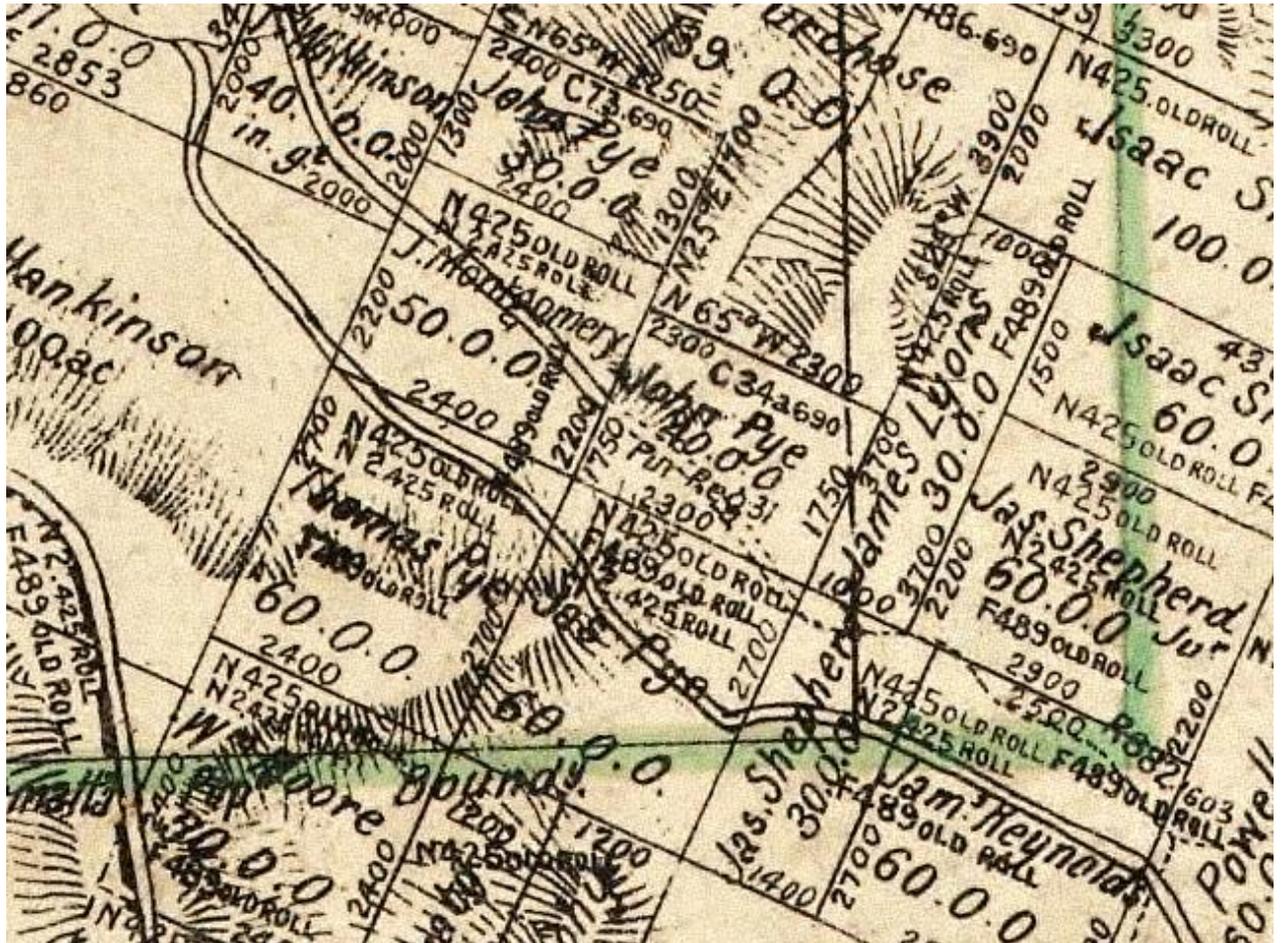


Figure 5 The parish map of South Colah dated as 13 November 1883 still showed both lines of road. Source: Parish Map, Parish South Colah, County Cumberland, 13 November 1883

A survey was made of James Pye's 60-acre grant plus some others nearby for a Real Property Application about 1889. The New Line of Road is shown but there is no detail of the former road to the south.¹

¹ DP 57160

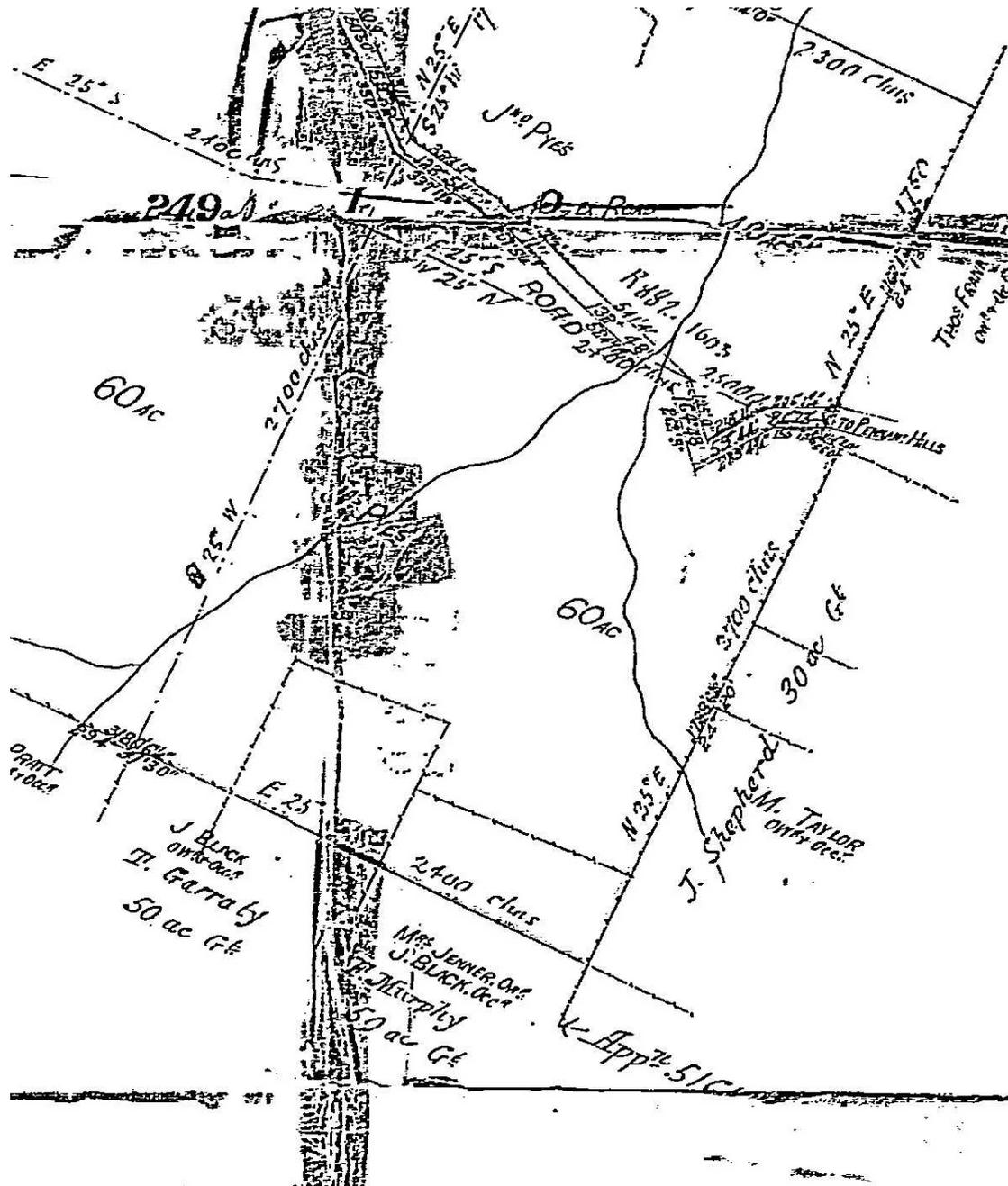


Figure 6 A Real Property Application survey of 1889 showed no detail of the original road alignment, or the bridge. Source: DP 57160

A subdivision of the land in Real Property Application 7160 dated as 3 May 1892 showed no detail of the old road to the south.¹

¹ DP 2771

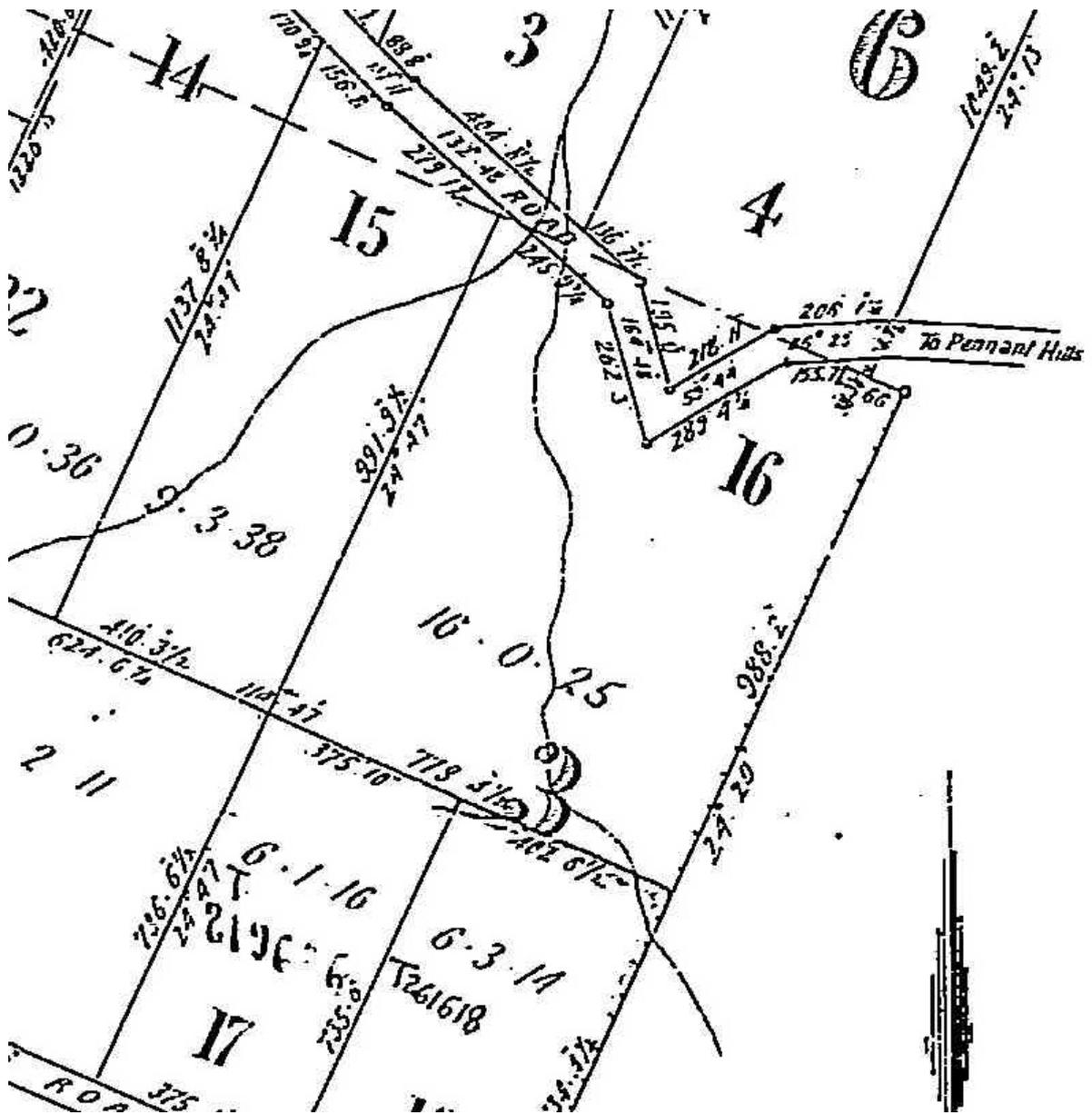


Figure 7 The subdivision plan of James Pye's 60 acres also showed no details of the original road or bridge. Source: DP 2771

The 1907 edition of the parish map of South Colah showed only the northern road alignment.



Figure 8 The 1907 parish map showed only the northern or later alignment of New Line Road. Source: Parish South Colah, County Cumberland, 1907

An aerial photo of 1943 showed a track running south from the hairpin bend in New Line Road to cross Pye’s Creek. No sign of the old road alignment is visible.



Figure 9 The 1943 aerial photo did not reveal the original road or the bridge.
Source: NSW - Roads and Traffic Authority, *From the Skies: Aerial photographs of Sydney in 1943*, CD-ROM, RTA, Sydney, 2005

3.0 Conclusion

There is no definitive information about when the bridge across Pyes Creek was built. It is positioned on the original line of the Great North Road as it passed through Castle Hill and across James Pye's 60 acre grant (Portion 245). It may have been that the bridge was built as part of the original works on that alignment of the road. However, it cannot be discounted that it may have been built at a slightly later date, though it would be more likely that a bridge would have been built as part of the original works on the road to make it trafficable.

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