

An Early 19th Century Book Report

A recent addition to the museum is a small book 4.5" x 7" (in old money) and unsurprisingly, given its age, it is not in good condition. However, it provides a touching peek into the childhood of two youngsters. Written inside the book in their own hand is:

John Pitman his Book, Osborne 1804

Ann Pitman her Book Oct 4th 1812

On the inside cover of the book John has practised writing his name in capitals - *JOHN PITMAN his book August 18 1803* - and inside he has practised his numbers.

Later the book has been covered in parchment and Ann/Anne has practised her name and signature many times.



Sadly, it has not been possible to identify either John or Ann with any certainty.

In 1786, a John Pitman *linman*¹ of Milborne takes John Hockwell a poor child as apprentice. Could this John be our John's father?

In 1794, a John Way Pitman, son of John and Ann, is baptised at the Congregational Chapel in Milborne Port. This John moved to London, became a successful merchant and died in 1881.

A John Pitman, parchment maker, died in Osborne in 1842. He mentions no family in his will but leaves £100 to be invested and the interest earned to be used to buy clothing for the poor of Osborne.

In 1804, Ann Pitman, daughter of James and Keturah Pitman, was baptised at St John the Evangelist in Milborne Port.

¹ linen maker

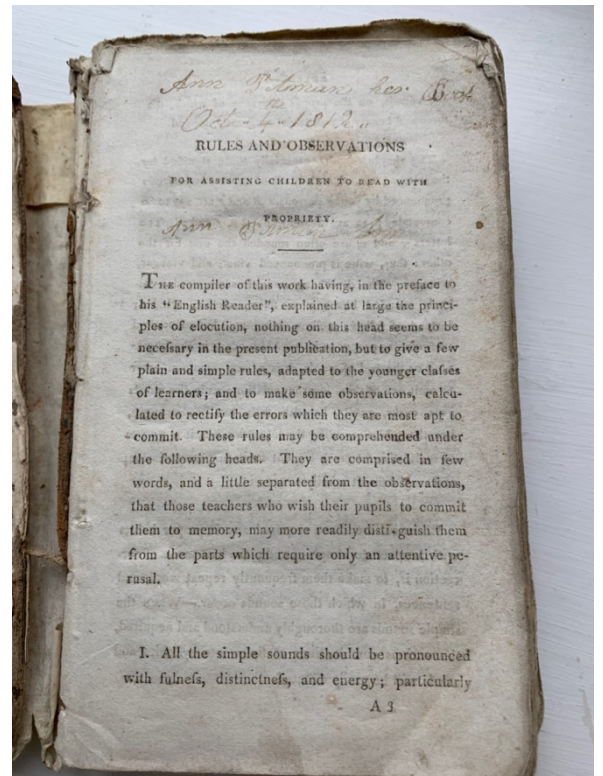
I wonder which one, if any, owned the book? This type of book could only have been afforded by a comfortably off, middle class family, around the average weekly wage for an agricultural labourer in 1800.

We are not quite sure what the title of the book is as the front cover and spine are missing, but clues inside suggest that it is either:

The English Reader: or, Pieces in Prose and Poetry, Selected from the Best Writers Designed to Assist Young Persons to Read with Propriety and Effect; to Improve Their Language and Sentiments; and to Inculcate Some of the Most Important Principles of Piety and Virtue. With a Few Preliminary Observations on the Principles of Good Reading. (1799)

Or

Sequel to The English Reader Or, Elegant Selections in Prose and Poetry. Designed to Improve the Highest Class of Learners in Reading. (1800)



The writer was Lindley Murray (1745-1826).

The book has 238 pages but pages 23 and 24 are missing. Following a section on Rules and Observations are some *Pieces in Prose*, probably typical of the attitudes of the time, and still relevant today:

1. Canute and his courtiers – Flattery reproved
2. The two robbers – We often condemn in others what we practise ourselves
3. Socrates and Lamprocles – Disrespect to parents, is in no case allowable
4. Socrates and Chaerecrates – Brethren should dwell together in harmony
5. A family conversation – On the slavery of the negroes

Number 5 shows quite clearly that some people were not unaware of the atrocities of the slave trade:

Augusta

My dear papa, you once informed me that, in the West-Indies, all laborious operations were performed by negro slaves. Are those islands inhabited by negroes? I thought these people were natives of Africa.

Father

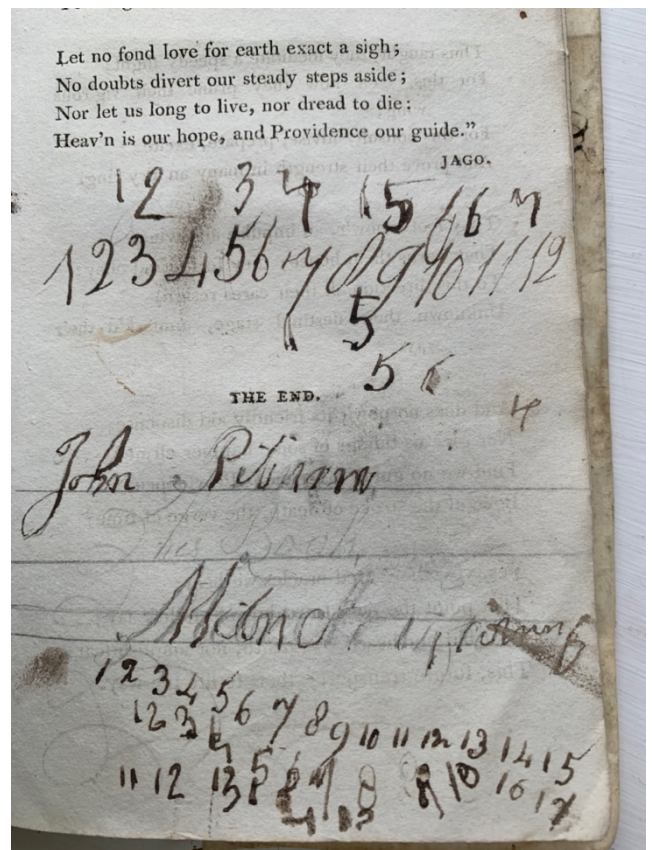
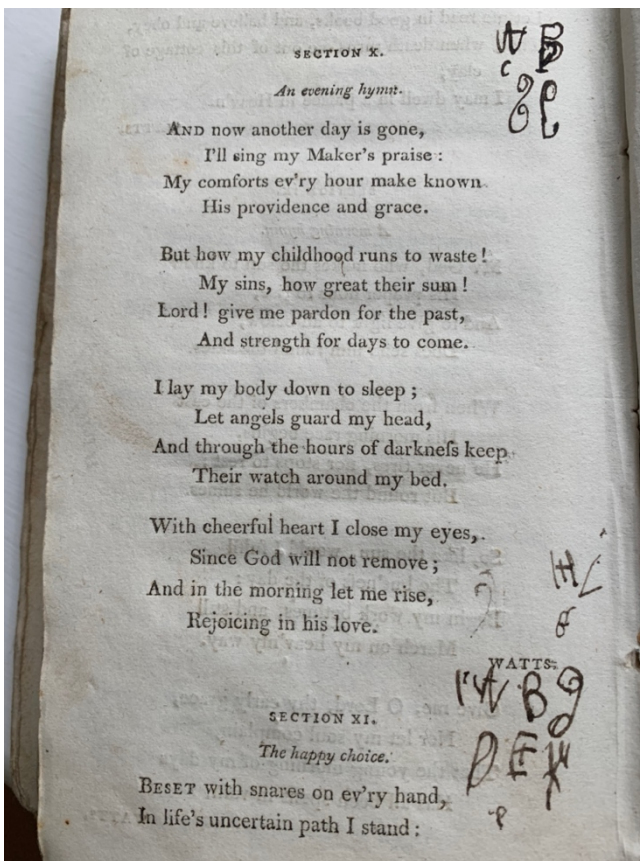
You are right, my dear; they are, indeed, natives of Africa; but they have been snatched, by the hand of violence, from their country, friends, and connexions. I am ashamed to confess

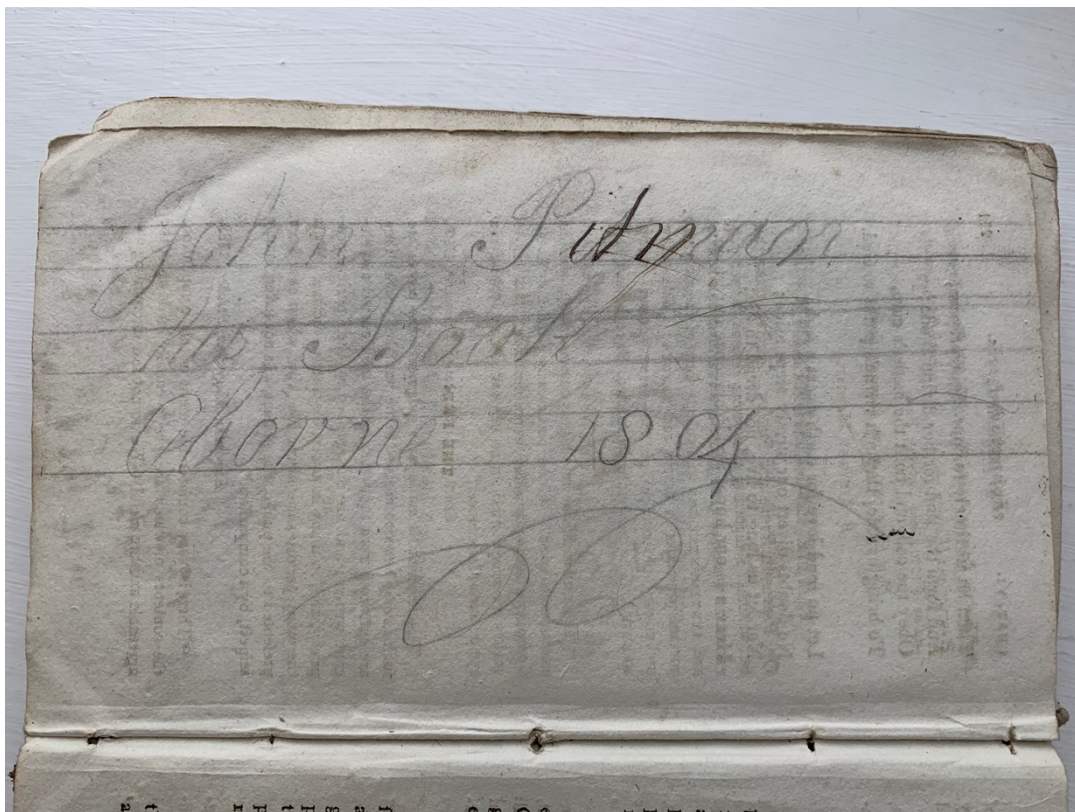
that many ships are annually sent from different parts of England, to the coast of Guinea, to procure slaves from that unhappy country, for the use of our West India islands, where they are sold to the planters of sugar-plantations; and afterwards employed in the hardest and most servile occupations; and pass the rest of their lives in slavery and wretchedness.

Sophia

How much my heart feels for them! How agonizing must it be, to be separated from one's near relations! Parents perhaps divided from their children for ever; husbands from their wives; brothers and sisters obliged to bid each other a final farewell! But why do the kings of the African states suffer their subjects to be so cruelly treated?

Do you think that these children might have had a ticking off from their parents for doodling in their book and for not looking after it carefully?





To read more:

https://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~duchan/new_history/enlightenment/murray_lindley.html

Valerie Jackson July 2023