



Sarah Fogo

In early Dunedin most murders were committed by men. Although it was far less common, a woman could be charged with murder, and only one was sentenced to be hanged in Dunedin prison.

Sarah Muir Fogo was charged with murder that on Saturday September 29, 1900, she stabbed her husband of 30 years, Thomas Telfour Fogo, to death.

London born Sarah Manning had married Thomas Fogo about four years after she arrived in New Zealand. Her son and daughter both gave evidence at the trial of their father's violent behaviour. Thomas Fogo, a painting contractor, was a heavy drinker and there were frequent family rows when he arrived home to his Frederick Street house in a drunken state. All the evidence indicated that the late Mr. Fogo presented a different personality to the outside world than he did at home. His children described him as being generous with money, but often sullen and morose in his behaviour and prone to hitting family members, especially his wife and daughter.

The trial was held before Mr. Justice Williams during the last week of November 1900. Sarah pleaded self-defence, claiming that she herself would have been killed if she hadn't stabbed her husband. However the jury returned a 'Guilty' verdict, with a strong recommendation for mercy. The judge agreed with the recommendation and stated he would intimate that concurrence to the advisor of the Crown. He then donned the black cap and sentenced Sarah Fogo to the mandatory penalty of being hanged by the neck until she was dead. On December 15, 1900, a telegram arrived at the Dunedin prison advising the gaoler, Mr. Phillips, that the death sentence was commuted to one of life imprisonment.

Mrs. Fogo was released on special remission on November 24, 1910, and died at her residence in Castle Street, Dunedin, on Friday, April 28, 1911. She is buried in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery in the same grave as her husband !, and an infant son who had died 35 years earlier in 1875, aged 11 months (Block 29, Plot 7 & 8). How ironic, (or deliberate?) that she should be buried next to the man she murdered.

Acknowledgment:

"Dunedin Gaol, a Community Prison since 1851" by Bill Martin 1998