



The words “Hard Labour” from the sentencing judge meant just that. Dunedin needed manpower to build a city from a settlement and prisoners were used to fill that need.

They drained swamps, reclaimed the harbour, built roads and were used on other labour-intensive projects.

One of the most impressive examples of the use of Dunedin Prison labour was in the removal of Bell Hill. This huge hill, which divided Dunedin and hindered its development northward, was of volcanic origin and consisted of bluestone boulders. The boulders were split by inmate labour and sold for building purposes. Much of the material removed was not suitable for building and was used as fill in the harbour reclamation works. It took 18 years to complete the transformation of the hill to the shape it is today. For 15 of those years the work was supervised by Sergeant John William Outram, an officer from the prison. During those years he used explosives to break up the larger rocks without causing any serious injury to any person or damage to property.

Sergeant Outram’s work so impressed the merchants of Princes Street North that in 1877 they presented him with a testimonial recognising the care he had displayed in carrying out a laborious and dangerous job. Outram was also the overseer for the construction of the first bridge over the Andersons Bay inlet. In later years Outram was a senior warder at the prison, a position he held until his retirement on a pension to live at his Royal Terrace home.

It is ironic that this highly respected man who had served so well, later had his pension of 180 pounds per year disallowed and it required a petition to parliament to in 1892 before it was restored.

John Outram died on November 6, 1909 survived by four sons and two daughters. He was born in Leicester, England in 1830 and arrived in Dunedin in 1858.

His wife Betsy had died four years earlier and they are both buried in Dunedin's Southern Cemetery in a grave marked only by a footstone strangely titled "OUTRAMS".

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand from "Dunedin Gaol – a community prison since 1851" by Bill Martin.

> www.cemeteries.org.nz