

Murder at St Helena Penal Establishment

JOL Admin

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“A picture is worth a thousand words...” is how the saying goes. In this case it’s not the picture held at Queensland State Archives, but the public records that tell the stories. The tranquil ruins of the St Helena prison stores buildings conceal tales of mayhem and murder.

In February 1898, warder Henry Harris Dodd was fatally stabbed by prisoner William Archer. Archer held a grudge against a warder, but it wasn’t Dodd. According to Superintendent James Ryan, Archer complained to warder Downie, who restrained him after the stabbing, that he was ‘... the bugger it was intended for’. Read more in QSA Item ID 847555 letters 2353/1898, 661/1898 & 16067/1897, top numbered to letter 3696/1898.

Warder Henry Dodd was buried at Toowong Cemetery on 20 February 1898. If you look closely at the bottom row of the burial register next to H.H. Dodd’s name, you’ll see the faint annotation which reads: ‘Killed by Archer, St Helena’.

William Archer was never tried for the murder because of ill health. He died in prison. The last entry the Brisbane Visiting Surgeons’ journal for H.M. Gaol states he was administered morphine on 7 May 1898. Refer to QSA Item ID 212525, Register – visitors, medical officers for details.

Comptroller-General of Prisons, Charles Edward de Fonblanque Pennefather ensured monetary compensation for Warder Henry Dodd’s widow, Elizabeth and his family. Further details can be found in QSA Item ID 847555 letters 3194/1898 & 2353/1898, top numbered to letter 3696/1898.

This story did not end there. In a cruel twist of fate, Elizabeth Dale (nee Dodd) drowned after slipping into a dam at the Toowong Cemetery in 1905. You can read more about the death of Elizabeth Dale (nee Dodd) in the inquest, QSA Item ID 348928, file 56/1905.

Visit Queensland State Archives to discover more about the prisoners at the St Helena Penal Establishment, including the identity of the last prisoner to leave on 15 February 1933. You may start your research on the [Queensland State Archives’ website](#) and by searching the [QSA catalogue - ArchivesSearch](#).