

DEATH OF CAPTAIN CHARLES WALDRON — THE TRUE STORY.

At the May meeting of the Society the speaker was Mr. W. G. McDonald (President), whose address entitled "More Deadly than the Male? — the Strange End of Captain Waldron," dealt with the death of Captain Charles Waldron, J.P., of "Spring Hill," Illawarra; the trial and conviction of two assigned servants, Sarah McGregor and Mary Maloney, for his murder; and the seemingly inexplicable commutation of the death sentence. The talk was based on official documents (including the depositions at the trial) and contemporary newspaper reports.

"Spring Hill" stood near the figtree behind the Transfield camp in Spring Hill Road. According to Alexander Stewart, George Tate had there the first inn in Illawarra, near the original road from the landing-place at Brighton Beach to Dapto.

Tate in 1832 sold the property (no longer an inn) to Captain Waldron, a Peninsular veteran, who settled there with his wife and large family. On 14th January, 1834 an altercation between Waldron and the two women culminated in the Captain's being set upon, knocked down, and beaten about the head as he lay on the rough stones of the courtyard. Male convicts, at first standing passively by, pulled the women off only after Charles Waldron, age twelve, had come to his father's rescue.

Half an hour later the Captain became paralysed on one side, and after lingering for a fortnight died on 28th January. The women were tried for murder at the Supreme Court, Sydney, on 22nd February. Conflicting evidence was given by Mrs. Waldron and Charles on the one hand and by William Wade, a convict, and James King, a ticket-of-leave man, on the other, as to the preceding exchange of incivilities and the assault itself. The weight of evidence was that Captain Waldron was irritable and prone to outbursts of rage, though this was stoutly denied by his widow; but not even Wade and King would say that he was a harsh or cruel master.

Dr. Montague Grover, who had attended the Captain in his last illness, failed to appear. The two women were convicted and sentenced to death; but the execution was postponed for two days while a jury of matrons investigated Sarah's claim to be pregnant (which would legally have entitled her to a respite till after her confinement, usually leading to a commutation of the sentence). Her claim proved unfounded; but during those two days the missing Dr. Grover appeared to swear that Captain Waldron had died not from the blows or the fall but from natural causes—there being "a predisposition to paralysis in his system arising from the impaired state of his stomach."

The Executive Council, hastily convened by Governor Bourke, commuted the sentences to three years' hard labour, the maximum penalty for assault.

The speaker added that he had submitted a copy of the depositions to Dr. C. H. Chaffey (Member), who, from the witnesses' descriptions of Captain Waldron's symptoms, had diagnosed the case as one of cerebral thrombosis resulting from hypertension resulting from arteriosclerosis, and had expressed the opinion that the blows and the fall had contributed to the Captain's death only by sending up his blood pressure.

The depositions, the speaker thought, completely disproved the tradition that Captain Waldron died from injuries inflicted with a carving-knife by the two women, and the hypothesis that only some gross and outrageous provocation could explain the virtual pardoning of such a crime. The sentence was so drastically reduced simply because of medical evidence that the assault was not the cause of death.