



One of those colourful personalities who emerge from time to time, Sarah Smith was known for her frequent appearances before the Magistrates Court for drunkenness. Born in Dunedin 28 April 1897, her father Alfred Moore was born in Taranaki, and her mother Bridget Kathleen, nee Fogarty, was born in Roscrea, Ireland. Aged 23 Sarah married Alexander Smith and had a son and daughter, the latter drowning at an early age while her son Douglas died aged 47.

Described as a hard worker, Sarah, was also hard-looking and a chronic alcoholic. She wore long dresses to her ankles and usually carried a sugar bag on a rope. When aroused she had a colourful and volatile vocabulary.

Sarah's excursions to Dunedin usually saw her at the Crown or Grand Hotels culminating with encounters with the police, a night in the cells, and a fine in the Magistrates Court the following morning. She always had an original excuse for magistrates, H.W.Bundle, J.R.Bartholomew, and later J.D.Willis. Once asked, 'Well Smith, what excuse do you have this time?' she replied 'Well you Worship, I was celebrating my birthday and got carried away.' An excuse for being found lying on the footpath in the Exchange was 'Your Worship, I was minding my own business when a man came up and kissed me; his breath was so strong, it knocked me over.'

Sarah's period of notoriety began during the 1920s and continued until the mid-1950s. She was not always fined but received custodial sentences in the Dunedin Gaol where she was treated as a favoured guest. Police knew Sarah would be in town each weekend and in cold weather would look for her in doorways around Queens gardens and Rattray Street, bringing her in so she did not suffer

from exposure. In return for the policemen's kindness she would mend and darn socks of the single constables in the Police Barracks, and polish the floors of the old Dunedin Police Station until they shone.

Once she wandered into Hugh Gourlay's undertaking establishment and observing the coffins being made, through her alcoholic haze remarked, 'I hope I get a better box than that one.'

On 29 July 1957 police found Sarah in a serious condition in a house in Serpentine Avenue. Admitted to hospital she died a few hours later. Members of the police opened a subscription fund to assist with funeral expenses and floral tributes and many mourned the loss of one of Dunedin's most unusual and entertaining characters. Although only 60 years old when she died, she held the distinction of being a centenarian in her own right, with 101 convictions for drunkenness.

Sarah Elizabeth Smith is buried in Dunedin's Andersons Bay Cemetery, her grave marked with a simple red granite headstone, which interestingly shows her date of death as 13 July 1957.