

In Darkness and In Secrecy is based on the 1864 murder of Margaret Graham, which unfolded in the towns of Daylesford, Castlemaine and Ballarat. This was the thirteenth murder in thirteen years on the Daylesford Gold Fields. The person who stood trial and was subsequently found guilty and hanged for the murder in 1866 was a vagabond traveler named David Young. Young was the first person to be hanged at the Castlemaine Gaol. This story has always created community debate as to whether Young was in fact guilty. According to community folklore and the newspaper of the time, *The Daylesford Mercury*, Margaret's husband George allegedly confessed to the murder on his deathbed.

The Central Highlands of Victoria is famous for its gold history. Many stories focus on the heroic and hard working miners and the challenging conditions of the times. Very little information has been preserved about the darker and perhaps seedier side of life on the gold fields. Issues relating to greed, obsession, alcohol abuse, violence and crime were often dealt with by a legal system still in its infancy - a legal system that based its prosecution on presumption and circumstantial evidence.

At the time of the trial, and to this day, many of the Daylesford public felt that Young was convicted and hanged based on circumstantial, inconsistent and fabricated evidence. In his judgment in 1865, Justice Best made the following contentious comment: That the verdict of guilty *"is enough if its existence be highly probable particularly if the opposite party has it in his power to rebut it by evidence, and yet offers none; for then we have something like an admission that the presumption is just."*

In Darkness and In Secrecy opened in March at the Old Castlemaine Gaol as part of the Castlemaine Fringe Festival. The play was specifically written for the old gaol setting but also needed to be adaptable for other venues, when it was staged during its Victorian Central Highlands Tour.

Staging the play in a wing on the gaol meant that only a limited audience could be admitted. Seating was provided for forty audience members and a very intimate and close piece of theatre was created.

Even though the play is based on the 1864 story, it was not written or staged as an historical piece. The final work produced had an almost timeless quality, established through muted, moody lighting, somewhat contemporary costuming and a very basic set. However some of the music used throughout the play did come specifically from the goldfields era.