

Child prostitutes and pedophile rings, suicides and damaged souls: what is it about hard working, clean living "Wonderful Wollongong" that produced such horrors? And was the gruesome murder of its former mayor in June a fitting end for a depraved pederast, or was Frank Arkell just a tragic figure trapped in his own lies? **Richard Guillatt** investigates.

# City of secrets

**F**RANK ARKELL NEVER ADMITTED HE was gay. In all his years as the tirelessly self-promoting mayor of Wollongong, right up to the winter night two months ago when he was bludgeoned to death in his home, Arkell maintained a charade of heterosexuality common to so many men of his generation. He shunned the gay community and allied himself with Christian morals campaigners. He gave interviews to his local paper explaining that one day he might marry "the right girl". He opposed the legalisation of homosexuality in 1984. He never discussed his sexuality with his lawyers, even though it might have helped them defend him against the pederasty charges he was due to face next month in the NSW District Court.

It was a charade constructed for both personal and political reasons. Arkell's mother, with whom he lived most of his life, was a devout Catholic who could never have countenanced the idea that her son had succumbed to the evils of Sodom. And Wollongong – a city which for decades was dominated by the BHP steel smelter and the Catholic Church, by old-fashioned notions of masculinity and morality – could likewise never have accepted a gay mayor. Gay couples might walk freely through the streets of Sydney, 80 km north of here, but Wollongong is a place where,

as one local puts it, "the '60s never happened".

Of course, Wollongong's blue-collar Irish Catholic history is precisely what makes the revelations of the past two years so incongruous and compelling. Seldom has a city's self-image been stripped so bare as was Wollongong's by the Wood royal commission in NSW, which two years ago impelled a procession of the town's forgotten sons to deliver up its secrets. It now transpires that Wollongong was run for 20 years by two mayors who preyed sexually on their teenage constituents, and that a raft of well-to-do figures – the headmaster of the local Catholic boys' college, a local councillor with five children, a rotund industrialist who drove around town in a Rolls-Royce, a Catholic priest, a local restaurant manager, a shark-patrol pilot – molested dozens of boys for years with apparent impunity.

In a town that never quite recovered from the recession of the early '80s, where shopfronts on the main street are still boarded up and youth unemployment runs as high as 40 per cent, the destructive legacy of this scandal has been felt acutely. Four people connected with the pedophile revelations have committed suicide, and the savagery of Arkell's murder – which followed the gruesome decapitation of a bachelor shopowner from the city's southern suburbs – has raised the possibility



LEFT: PETER MORRIS. RIGHT: ILLAWARRA MERCURY





Torn apart: as mayor, Frank Arkell (pictured here after police questioning) worked hard to rid Wollongong of its industrial, blue-collar reputation, but lived a shadowy double life, frequenting gay beats and using male prostitutes.

that a homophobic serial killer is on the loose.

But the lurid headlines have obscured some of the deeper questions left in the wake of the scandal. Is there some reason this all happened in Wollongong? Was Arkell really a central player in an "evil pedophile network" (as one columnist put it the day after his death) or is the real story more complex and more murky? There are those in Wollongong who argue that the city's shadowy sexual world has to be understood as something that occurred not despite the city's social mores, but because of them.

"What's got to be said is that in a city where homophobia was rampant and homosexuality was most strongly censured, we had the most widespread activity by pederasts in public life," says Paul Matters, secretary of the local labour council. "And that's no accident in my view. The tragedy is that people are going to extrapolate this to the rest of Australia when it could only really happen in a city like this."

Matters was one of Frank Arkell's political enemies but, like many in Wollongong, he wonders whether the former mayor was really the monster depicted in the tabloids or a gay man compelled by his own deceptions to find sex among the most vulnerable. It's a view that gets unexpected endorsement from one of the men who claims to be a victim of Arkell's, former teenage prostitute David Potbury.

"Frank Arkell? I wouldn't really call him a pedophile," says Potbury, who claims he had sex with the former mayor on six occasions in 1984. In Potbury's view, Arkell was a sad figure, a "closet queen" forced to find sex in furtive encounters with young men. "If he'd moved somewhere else, he could have been more open. But because his mother lived in Wollongong and his family were respectable, he felt he didn't want to let them down."

Wollongong today is not the place it was when Frank Arkell became mayor in 1975. Like many heavy-industrial centres, the city has strived to reinvent itself as a cosmopolitan haven for white-collar refugees from the big smoke. The massive BHP smelter still casts its glow across the night sky and the black form of Mount Keira still looms to the west – a reminder of the coal-rich earth that helped bring prosperity – but tourism and the local university are the growth employers today.

Arkell helped create this new Wollongong, but he grew up in the old one. His parents' modest house was out on the swamplands south of town, within walking distance of the steelworks that was built in the 1920s and which employed his truck-driving father through the Depression and beyond. The Irish were the immigrant labourers of that era and, like many families, the Arkells sent their sons to the local Christian Brothers College.

Decades later, it's striking how many of Wollongong's pederast offenders were products of this school system. The most infamous of them, former mayor Tony Bevan, went to the Christian Brothers College around the same time as Frank Arkell, as did Brian Tobin, a city councillor who later became a regular customer of Bevan's teenage male prostitutes. Father Peter Comensoli, the Wollongong priest convicted in 1994 of sexually assaulting an 11-year-old and a 16-year-old boy, went there in the early 1950s, and Brother Michael Evans, one of the Catholic Church's most flagrant molesters, was the school's principal in the 1980s after it was renamed Edmund Rice College.

Of course, hundreds of men passed through the college without becoming sexual deviants, but Paul Matters says out loud what many people in Wollongong wonder. "I think the men who were



socialised in that environment learned early on that, if you are powerful, you can do it, provided it doesn't become public knowledge. I think they learned that from the Church."

A Christian Brothers education in the post-war years was fiercely moralistic, sexually repressive and driven home with physical punishment. At the school's silver jubilee in 1986, Brother Kevin O'Farrell – the principal when Bevan, Arkell and Tobin attended – raised a few laughs with a joke which in retrospect has an awful echo: "[Frank] was one of the tender little boys of the school, and look what we've done to him."

To be gay in this environment was taboo. Even by the early 1960s, when Arkell and Bevan began considering politics, Wollongong was still a tough workers' town: the smelter and port were the big industries, and many constituents were European immigrants clustered in unseweraged enclaves on the outskirts. Born into families whose businesses had flourished as the city grew, Arkell and Bevan were real estate men who became local councillors and aspired to big-time politics, but they were outsiders – independents in a Labor-dominated town. Both lived with their mothers and quickly learned to dodge questions about their marital status. There was no choice in a State where homosexuality was not legalised until 1984.

Bevan laid the blueprint for this masquerade during his tenure as mayor from 1965 to 1968. Grooming himself as a dashing bachelor – he flew shark-spotting patrols along the shore, dressed sharply and cultivated friendships among senior police and politicians – he explained to the *South Coast Times* that he had a girlfriend "not too far out of town". This might not have been an outright lie, as Bevan

a broken family, I had never had anyone pay attention to me like that before. I had no male figure in my life to guide me, and that's how they broke through to you. You didn't learn much about sexuality at all when you were that age unless you had someone around to talk to ... It was like you were a little puppy: you were looked after, given money, things were bought for you. You were picked up."

The shark patrol became the bait Bevan used to lure local boys into his sexual orbit – a place where the excitement of plane rides and trailbike escapades became the first step in a cynical seduction process that led from pornographic magazines to masturbation to anal sex. Bevan had an eye for the vulnerable and impressionable – kids from broken homes, orphanages, the streets, some as young as 12. Stansbury recalls being flattered by his overtures and then going home to a house that had nothing, and a single mother who he felt resented him.

A lousy mayor but a consummate liar and wheeler-dealer, Bevan became a property dealer and



The boys' club: the church hierarchy allowed Brother Michael Evans (right) to open a youth refuge even after several claims of sexual misconduct; a 1983 police report described Tony Bevan (below) as a "well-known pederast".



fathered an illegitimate son in 1959. But he seems to have been a sexual opportunist whose primary fixation was pubescent boys.

"Bevan lived in a fantasy world," says Doug Kenyon, a former councillor who knew Bevan for more than 30 years. "He used to make up stories and believe things that didn't exist. He had no inhibitions. I mean, he was a con man."

Bevan's homosexuality was well known in local political circles but never openly acknowledged. But by the early '70s, something else about him was becoming well known. Bevan had struck up a relationship with local Yugoslav-born teenager, Peter Foretic, who hung around the shark patrol office at Windang Aerial Patrol Base, 14 km south of town, eventually becoming a pilot there. Soon there were a lot of teenage boys hanging around, kids like Frank Stansbury, a 13-year-old runaway from an impoverished home who had met Bevan while hanging around a cafe on the main street.

"Bevan got me by taking me up in the plane," recalls Stansbury, now 31 and living on the Gold Coast. "It was a real spin for me. Coming from

Cross, where Bevan's infamous "royal parties" entertained men at hotels and at Costello's nightclub. Throughout it all, Bevan lived with his mother at home in the centre of Wollongong, where Peter Foretic was a frequent house guest. "She would have had to have been blind not to notice," comments one of his former friends.

Some 20 or 30 boys passed through Bevan's teenage prostitution ring from the mid-'70s to the mid-'80s, many recruited early in adolescence and dropped once they reached the age of 18. A regular customer of their services was Brian Tobin, a diminutive father of five who, according to David Potbury and others, had regular afternoon sex sessions with them in his real estate office in the city's suburbs. (Both Tobin and Peter Foretic killed themselves in 1996 after receiving subpoenas from the Wood royal commission.) Another associate was the late Tom Gaun, a rotund local millionaire industrialist who drove around town in a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow with personalised numberplates. Gaun was an accomplished pianist and bandmaster of the Wollongong City brass

band, which brought him into contact with many students from Edmund Rice College.

Later still came Russel Baxter\*, the manager of a local entertainment centre and restaurant. Baxter was an openly gay man who had met Bevan in Kings Cross, where he had owned Costello's and *Campaign* magazine before moving to the south coast of NSW.

It was not exactly a discreet operation. Bevan often had sex with boys in his office and obtained regular supplies of penicillin from a chemist in the city to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Gaun allowed youths to drive his Rolls-Royce up to Sydney on his weekly forays to Kings Cross, and one member of Bevan's circle recalled being grilled by naval police in the mid-'70s. Yet Bevan seemed remarkably sanguine, barely bothering to tell his boys to be wary of the cops.

"Bevan certainly had a friendly relationship with all the police," comments Doug Kenyon.

Another possible reason for Bevan's arrogance was the tape-recorder he kept by his office telephone, on which he recorded his calls in order to obtain potentially useful blackmail material. After Bevan died from cancer in 1991, Wollongong's *Illawarra Mercury* newspaper obtained copies of the tapes, published their contents and turned them over to the Wood royal commission. The tapes are a study in warped narcissism, as Bevan chats jauntily to friends about his exploits at home and in the Philippines, referring to himself as "Mother" and the boys he is abusing as "she" or "it". Even the tragic youth unemployment of the late '70s, which flooded Kings Cross with street kids, was grist for his sexual appetites.

"I look forward to Sydney because there's so much about and it's just coming out of the bloody

**"These men learned early on that, if you are powerful, you can do it, provided it doesn't become public knowledge."**

acquired a penthouse apartment in the newly built Creston tower in the middle of town, with floor-to-ceiling windows and panoramic views. There, his growing circle of boys performed sexual favours for him and his associates; pornographic films were shot and weekly trips were made up to Kings

bubblers at the moment," Bevan said to a fellow pederast on one tape. "Unemployment of course isn't helping and they are running everywhere."

Police investigations of Bevan had a remarkable propensity for going nowhere. He was picked up at Costello's with a 13-year-old boy in 1979, and interviewed by police three years later about allegations that he had sexually assaulted an 11-year-old State ward and a 13-year-old learning-disabled boy whose father worked for Bevan. Interviewed at Wollongong police headquarters, Bevan explained that he "liked to help underprivileged children"; three months later, he sent a cheerful Christmas card to the detective who had investigated him. A swirl of allegations would surround Bevan for the rest of his life – a 1983 police report described him as a "well-known homo and pederast" and a 1991 Tactical Intelligence Report linked him to pedophiles in Sydney – but he was never again interviewed by Wollongong police.

"You have to understand the way things worked in the early 1980s and before," says Mark Luchetti, a uniformed Wollongong cop from 1976 to 1989. "If word came down from the hierarchy that you didn't pursue a matter, you knew what was good for you." Luchetti recalls an incident early in his career when he came across a gold Mercedes parked near a well-known homosexual "beat" at 3 am; Luchetti called in the licence plate and was told the car belonged to Justice David Yeldham of the Supreme Court, who had been seconded to Wollongong that week. But the duty



Frank Stansbury, who was abused by Tony Bevan as a 13-year-old, says he was taken in by flattery, gifts and attention.



Evans eventually committed suicide in 1994 after his activities were exposed; his colleague Father Peter Comensoli was later convicted of two sex offences and jailed.

Tony Bevan's activities were not exposed until after his death in 1991, and the young men who had been part of his prostitution ring drifted away and took their secrets with them. For many, the experience of being dumped by Bevan once they had reached their use-by date was traumatic. Frank Stansbury, for instance, recalls that at 14 he became damaged goods after being picked up by Kings Cross police one night and put on

**F**RANK ARKELL LIKED TO SAY THAT HE WAS "married to Wollongong". It was a mantra he repeated endlessly during his 17-year reign as mayor, a phrase that embodied his passion for the town while also serving as an artful dodge to the endless questions about his marital status.

Even by Australian standards, Wollongong was a notably homophobic environment in the years during which Arkell rose through the political ranks. The *Illawarra Mercury* had a fascination with homosexuality that many locals considered prurient and sensationalist, and George Petersen, a local Labor MP for two decades, acknowledges that "sheer bloody prejudice" towards gays was common in the city where heavy industry dominated. Petersen recalls that when he proposed

**"If word came down from the [police] hierarchy that you didn't pursue a matter, you knew what was good for you."**

officer at the Wollongong CIB office intimated that if Luchetti pursued the matter, his career in Wollongong would probably be short-lived.

Few of Wollongong's high-profile pederasts were troubled by the authorities. The year Bevan was interviewed by police, a curly-haired young Christian Brother called Michael Evans turned up in the city to take up his new position as principal of Edmund Rice College. Cocky and cherubic, Evans would quickly establish himself as the most high-profile church figure in Wollongong. But it would later be revealed – again, by the *Illawarra Mercury* – that Evans had begun molesting his students almost immediately after his arrival, and that complaints to the Catholic Church and police had failed to elicit action.

a train back to Wollongong. The next time he saw Bevan, the former mayor brushed past him as if he didn't exist. Cut loose from the only male figures he felt close to, Stansbury spiralled into juvenile crime, followed by heroin addiction and a drug-trafficking bust that reaped him four years in jail.

Today, the legacy of those years is etched in his gaunt face and prison tattoos. Four years out of jail, he is unemployed and living with his partner and their two children in a townhouse off the Pacific Highway on the Gold Coast, still struggling to piece his life back together. Sometimes he dreams of being back in prison, where life is simpler. "I always wonder if things would have been different if my father was there," he says with a forlorn smile.

a Bill legalising homosexuality in 1981, a local Labor Party colleague called him a "poofster".

"There is no doubt in my mind that Arkell couldn't have attained his position if he had come out," says Wollongong solicitor Mark McDonald. "You could not possibly be openly gay in this town back then if you wanted to get anywhere."

So Arkell surrounded himself with moral conservatives such as his political ally, Councillor Pat Franks, and his long-time lawyer, Peter Daly, a deeply conservative Catholic and former DLP candidate. Two months after Arkell joined the NSW Parliament as Member for Wollongong, he voted against the historic Bill that legalised homosexuality in the State. Gay activists responded by erecting a pink wooden closet outside the gates of Parliament

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House emblazoned with a sign: The Frank Arkell Memorial Closet. Unabashed, Arkell appeared on the front page of the *Illawarra Mercury* the next year above the headline, "I deeply regret I never married." In the story he expressed regret about being a bachelor and mused that marriage could happen if the "right girl" came along.

Almost reflexively, Arkell's friends and acquaintances say today they had no inkling of any sexual misconduct by him. It says something about Wollongong's social mores that his close friend Doug Prosser, who had known Arkell since they both rode bikes along the dirt roads surrounding the smelter in the 1940s, says he never realised his friend was gay.

**F**OR MUCH OF HIS TIME AS MAYOR, ARKELL revelled in his image as a silver-haired civic-booster who would lead Wollongong out of the economic trough that was created when BHP laid off 10,000 workers in the early '80s. Like some half-demented spruiker he paced the city streets, past boarded-up shops and clusters of listless unemployed youth, glad-handing complete strangers and smiling broadly. His crushing schedule – he worked every day, deep into the night, pausing only on Sundays to go to church – made him immensely popular. The slogans he helped popularise – "Wonderful Wollongong", "The Leisure Coast" – put a feel-good gloss on the city's woes.

Yet as far back as the mid-'80s, many people were already aware of the infamous tape-recording that reputedly captured Arkell sexually propositioning a teenage boy. Peter Cullen, editor-in-chief of the *Illawarra Mercury*, says Tony Bevan played him the tape in 1983. Doug Kenyon recalls hearing it about that time as well,

and says Bevan played it to many people. Bevan called it the "Scorpion" tape and fed the rumour that the lad on the tape was only 16 years old. In 1994, when Labor MP Deirdre Grusovin finally named Arkell under parliamentary privilege as a suspected pederast, she said she had heard a tape of him offering a boy sex over the telephone.

The origins of the Scorpion tape finally emerged last February during Arkell's committal hearing at Wollongong Local Court, when a former member of Bevan's circle, Peter Jacobsen\*, admitted during his evidence that his was the voice on the infamous tape. But Jacobsen was 21 years old at the time the tape was made and the evidence strongly suggests that his conversation with Arkell was a premeditated blackmail scheme hatched by Bevan.

This tawdry episode, as it has emerged from evidence before the Wood royal commission and the court, is a cautionary tale about the way false allegations of pedophilia can arise and the way homosexuality can be used as a weapon in politics. Despite their many similarities, Frank Arkell and Tony Bevan were never great friends, and at the time the Scorpion tape was made, Bevan was furious with Arkell for blocking his purchase of a historic church building in Wollongong. Several witnesses have testified that Bevan began looking for "dirt" with which to blackmail Arkell, and in 1979 a golden opportunity presented itself when Peter Jacobsen walked into his office.

According to Gavin Eade\*, a former "Bevan boy" present on that day, Jacobsen walked in and said to Bevan: "Guess who picked me up last night? ... Farkless Arkless." Jacobsen then went on to describe how he had had sex with Arkell at the mayor's house, and Bevan immediately called Arkell's office, put a blank tape in the recorder on

his desk and got Jacobsen to engage Arkell in a conversation about their encounter. Listening back to the tape – in which Arkell and Jacobsen discussed the possibility of a future liaison – Bevan had laughed and said: "Another one for the collection."

Fifteen years later, after he was approached by detectives from the Wood royal commission, Jacobsen would claim he was drugged and raped in Arkell's house on the night in question, an allegation that eventually formed the basis of five charges against the former mayor. But during the committal hearing, Gavin Eade contradicted this account, recalling that Jacobsen wore a "coy smile" when discussing his sexual encounter with Arkell and showed no indication of being drugged or raped the previous night.

There is little reason to doubt that Arkell, contrary to his protestations, really was gay and really did make sexual advances to teenage boys during his years as mayor. Three witnesses at the royal commission recalled sexual encounters with Arkell during their formative years, and others have come forward since. Frank Stansbury says Arkell turned up at Bevan's farm once in 1981-82 and asked him to undress; several men have told the *Illawarra Mercury* Arkell made overtures to them on the street in their youth; a former family friend, Rene Mori, claims Arkell drugged and raped him in 1984, and other civil compensation proceedings are believed to be under way.

But Arkell's committal hearing certainly raised as many questions as it answered. One of his four accusers was Terry Pierce\*, a 38-year-old former member of Bevan's prostitution ring who said Arkell paid him \$20 for a sexual encounter in a notorious Wollongong toilet block in 1973, when Pierce was 14. When Pierce first told this story to



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the Wood royal commission in May 1996, he depicted himself as a hapless victim of Bevan's ring who tried to help others escape its clutches. In fact, Pierce was by then a convicted pedophile who had first approached the royal commission a month after he was charged with the sexual assault of an intellectually handicapped 15-year-old boy. In exchange for his testimony, he received a letter from the royal commission which was presented for consideration at his sentencing hearing.

Pierce's prison records describe him as an inveterate liar prone to "romantic fantasies", and in 1997 he recanted his allegation against Arkell in a phone call to solicitor John Marsden. At Arkell's hearing, he explained he had recanted after receiving death threats from prison guards and denied concocting the Arkell allegation in order to get a reduced sentence, but the charges related to his allegations were struck out by magistrate Paul Johnson.

**A**NOTHER OF ARKELL'S ACCUSERS WAS DAVID Potbury, the former Bevan prostitute who told the court that as a 16-year-old he had sex with Arkell six times in 1984 – once at Windang air base and five times at a flat in the Wollongong suburbs.

Unfortunately, Potbury's evidence was contradicted

by his own testimony to the Wood royal commission when he recalled only one incident with Arkell, which occurred at Tony Bevan's penthouse apartment. Potbury explained he had been nervous during his testimony at the royal commission and recalled events incorrectly; charges relating to his allegations were either struck out on legal technicalities or dropped by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The end result was that Arkell faced only four charges at his forthcoming trial. Two related to the alleged rape of Peter Jacobsen and two related to the alleged sexual assault of Rene Mori, the former family friend. Mori had told police that in 1984, when he was 17, Arkell gave him a drink in the mayoral chambers at Wollongong City Council, then invited him back to his house. Mori said the drink made him feel "dizzy" and that after he drove to Arkell's house, the mayor had given him another and then undressed and sexually assaulted him. Mori subsequently had severe psychological problems and revealed the assault in 1997 while undergoing treatment in a psychiatric hospital.

One of the ironies of Arkell's life is that he stood a greater chance of winning his case if he admitted he was gay. Had he done so, Mori could have been

depicted as a former lover whose age at the time of their encounter was open to dispute; Jacobsen's allegations were unlikely to be sustained, given that they were contradicted by a prosecution witness. But Arkell was locked into the lie of being straight – as recently as November 1996 he had told *The Sydney Morning Herald*, "No, I am not gay, not at all."

In death, he is now as reviled as a monster. The *Illawarra Mercury* used the word "vigilante" to describe his killer, suggesting – perhaps inadvertently – that there was some moral justification to the killing. Sydney columnist Ray Chesterton felt that the murderer – who bludgeoned Arkell, stabbed him in the eye with his Rotary Club pin and stuck two tiepins in his cheeks – didn't go far enough. Stories about Arkell's alleged crimes have become increasingly lurid and tenuous. Police have already charged one Wollongong man with making false claims against Arkell, and a Brisbane man told two newspapers that Arkell raped him at age seven, but his allegations derive from "recovered memories".

Another man has claimed that in 1976 he was sexually assaulted by Arkell and Wollongong's other mutilation murder victim, David O'Hearn, on the same night, but police say O'Hearn wasn't even living in Wollongong at the time. Meanwhile, Rene Mori has been trying to sell a new story to the television media about alleged incidents in Parliament House involving other offenders.

Down at the South Coast Labour Council office in Wollongong, Paul Matters says he finds it striking that revelations of male teenage prostitution have evoked such horror in the city, even though prostitution by teenage girls has flourished for years. "It just seems to me that a new myth is being created in Wollongong, of the evil pedophiles and the decent people who opposed them," says Matters. "But the very people who are decrying Bevan and Arkell's behaviour are the ones who supported the social structure that drove people's sexuality underground."

Just how deeply Arkell involved himself in Bevan's boy-sex racket will never be known. David Potbury, who moved in the orbit of Bevan and his associates for many years, says the two men were associates who were, in a crucial way, dissimilar. "In a lot of ways, I felt sorry for Arkell because to me he was just a lonely gay man who, because of the situation he was in, had to associate with Bevan in order to have sex with Bevan's boys."

Towards the end, Frank Arkell looked haggard and old, his white hair awry, his self-possessed grin replaced by a haunted stare. Although he denied it, the revelations of the Wood royal commission had triggered a nervous breakdown which left him hospitalised and severely depressed. People in Wollongong reported strange encounters with him as he wandered the streets attempting to shake hands, a sad caricature of his glory days. Vandals had sprayed abusive graffiti around his home and, a week before his murder, he told his lawyers he was fearful for his life.

But Arkell believed he had a strong chance of being acquitted, and there are people in Wollongong who claim that the former mayor was publicly threatening to take revenge on all those who had crossed him – to spill the beans on the city's other dark secrets. It was known he was working on his memoirs and it was rumoured he had kept voluminous files, just as Tony Bevan had done before him.

Could Arkell have been killed to keep him quiet? That is not the most popular theory, of course – police investigations seem to be focused on the possibility that Arkell's killer is the same man who committed two other savage killings in the past year, possibly a homophobic serial murderer. If that were the case, it would be the final irony of Frank Arkell's deceitful life – that the homophobia he helped nurture eventually killed him. ■

\* Names marked with an asterisk have been changed to comply with suppression orders.

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## your turn

■ Lifting the lid can often reveal nasty things underneath, as Richard Guillatt's report on "Wonderful Wollongong" ("City of Secrets", August 22) illustrates.

As a Catholic, I was dismayed to read how some people within my Church abused their position and their faith to further their own twisted ends. I also began to wonder whether it was more than a coincidence that a town wracked with such social dysfunctionality recently copped such a bucketing.

However, one should not be quick to imply divine retribution. To trivialise the suffering of Wollongong residents by using fundamentalist, apocalyptic reasoning is unfair and unwise. Even so, your report does leave one with the impression that the idyllic township has the spectre of something dark and sinister looming over it.

One can only hope and pray that whatever lessons are to be learned from the demise of people like Frank Arkell, they are learned quickly and without any further tragedy.

*David McGovern  
Media officer  
Wesley Mission, NSW*

Scapegoating the Catholic Church for pedophilia has become common in recent years. It serves to keep the spotlight off similar problems in other organisations and groups in the community.

Richard Guillatt's article is the latest example. The closet homosexual Frank Arkell was treated with sympathy, but the reputations of the Christian Brothers and the Irish working class were totally blackened. The claim that "hundreds of men went through the college without becoming sexual deviants ... but many wonder" is a gratuitous insult. It would not be permitted against any other group in the community except Catholics.

Some of the notorious pedophiles in Wollongong were Catholics. More, it appears, were gay. Both community groups should be called to account. But Guillatt's effort to put all the blame on one of these groups while whitewashing the other has the ring of a desperate ploy. Today, thankfully, gay bashing is eschewed. Catholic bashing, evidently, is acceptable.

*Father Michael Shadbolt  
Hampton Park, Vic*

Give us a break! We've had pedophilia and floods and now we're the homophobia

capital of Australia. Frank Arkell is not "in death ... revealed as a monster".

There are three monsters at work in this whole sorry saga. One is the *Illawarra Mercury*, which revels in dirt and sensationalism. The second is the Government, which refuses to legislate for equal rights for homosexuals, including lowering the age of consent to 16. The third is the Church, which teaches that homosexuality is sinful. Little wonder homophobia is still evident in all Australian cities.

Frank Arkell's death was mourned by many ordinary, decent citizens of Wollongong who acknowledged that he did more to further the development of our beautiful city than any single person in its history.

*Jane Lewis  
Keiraville, NSW*

I worked with Frank Arkell for a year during his time as mayor of Wollongong.

Without a doubt, he was the most dynamic, hardworking mayor I have ever worked with; he was very progressive and active in changing the image of the city. I always found Frank to be a visionary and a complete gentleman. The stories about him and his tragic death sadden me very much.

*Carole Goldsmith  
Address withheld*

■ Your article "Doing it Tough" (August 22) claims that Mario Roso's becoming mayor of Myrtleford was "a first in Australia for a migrant". My great-grandfather, Charles Munger, migrated from Switzerland in the late 1870s/early 1880s and established a nursery business in Mascot, Sydney. By the 1890s, he had been elected to Botany council and was mayor of Botany in the early years of this century — half a century before Roso.

*Liane Degville  
Sydney, NSW*

■ According to the Reverend Peter Jensen (THE TWO OF US, August 22), by focusing on his opposition to the ordination of women, we miss "a huge amount of what's going on".

Can I suggest that a huge amount more would be going on in the Anglican Church if the other 60 per cent of its population was mobilised? I am amazed at how much energy the church in Sydney has wasted on disempowering women



who want to serve Christ. It's a bit like sending home volunteers from floods and fires ... you can't afford to be so picky at this moment in religious history. And anyway, you can't stop most of us; we just change context and do it regardless.

*Rev. Ann Jensen (no relation)  
Hartley, NSW*

■ All Pakistanis were shocked and aggrieved by the sad demise of Bishop Joseph ("The Invisible Martyr", August 15), an event the writer has unfairly exploited to criticise the law on blasphemy.

Offences relating to religion have figured in Pakistan's Penal Code since it was drafted by the British, about 150 years ago. Additions were made in 1982 and 1986. Of them, Section 295-c is called the "Blasphemy Law". Such a law is not peculiar to Pakistan; it exists on the statute books of many countries, including the US, UK, Germany and some other Muslim countries.

The controversy generated on this count has not been kicked off by the law itself, but through misuse or abuse of its provisions by registration of "false, baseless and frivolous" cases, registered to serve local interests and settle old scores.

Even so, the judiciary has been extremely careful in handling these cases. Convictions have been announced in only three cases and the death sentence imposed on two people, one Muslim and one Christian. Neither has been executed.

Islam believes in giving absolute reverence not only to the Holy Prophet but to all other prophets and religions. It strictly forbids use of derogatory remarks against other religions and their leaders. Section 295-c does not discriminate against any class or creed. It prescribes punishment for the offender without discriminating between Muslim and non-Muslim. It is equally applicable to all citizens.

*Rao Tehsin Ali Khan  
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Letters must be kept to 200 words, contain writer's full name, home address and daytime telephone number, and may be edited for purposes of clarity or space.