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National NSW Courts

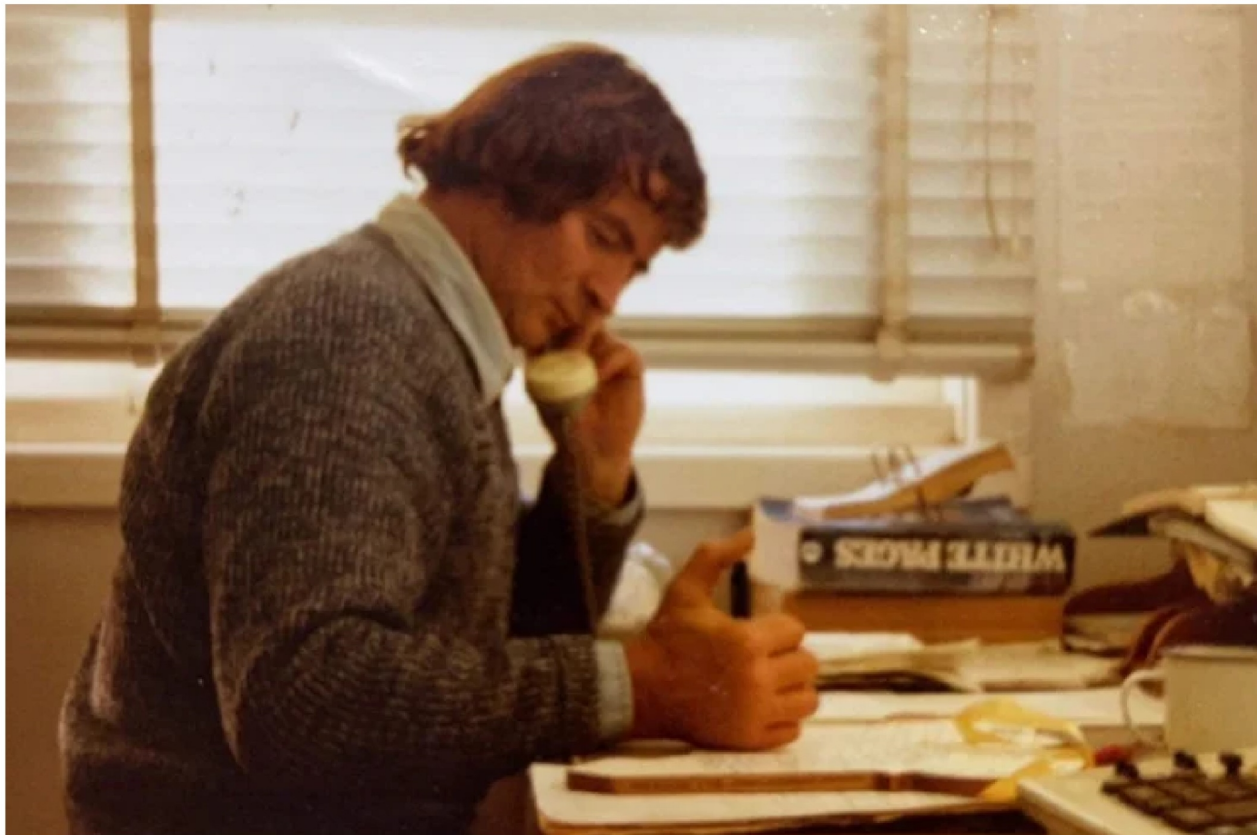
Caught in Spider's web: Eastern suburbs murder mystery solved

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On the night of Raymond Keam's death in Sydney's Alison Park, 36 years ago, locals heard noises that sounded like punching, moaning, or a cricket ball hitting the fence of the nearby kindergarten.

[One resident heard someone yell out](#), "you're killing me".



Raymond Keam was found dead in Sydney's east in 1987.

It wasn't until the early hours of January 13, 1987, as garbage truck workers passed by the Randwick park, that the 43-year-old father's body was found. Keam was cold and blue, some witnesses observed, and a Catholic sister prayed for his soul. A karate medallion, a gift from his wife, was found resting on his cheek.

The park was a known gay beat and disturbances were common in the middle of the night, the NSW Supreme Court heard.

Witnesses spoke of a man nicknamed “Spider” who roamed the park assaulting men he believed were homosexual. One man, then a schoolboy, said Spider would go into the toilet block with a baseball bat in his pants, and tell them to “get” men who came running out.

Prosecutors alleged Spider was 77-year-old Stanley Bruce Early, who a jury on Wednesday found guilty of Keam’s murder, following a month-long trial at Darlinghurst and a week of deliberations.

The largely circumstantial case against Early, who lived in a boarding house on The Avenue on the park’s eastern flank, was that he inflicted Keam’s fatal injuries with an intention to kill or cause grievous bodily harm, either on his own or in a joint criminal enterprise.



Stanley Early faced trial in Sydney accused of murdering Raymond Keam in Alison Park, Randwick.

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Crown prosecutor Ken McKay, SC, alleged Keam died from one or more blows to the head. He submitted the jury may infer that Keam was at the park because it was a gay beat.

A forensic pathologist determined Keam’s cause of death to be a traumatic subarachnoid hemorrhage, noted bruising and linear marks “similar to that which would be caused by the sole of a shoe” over his chest, and opined that he had been “savagely assaulted”.

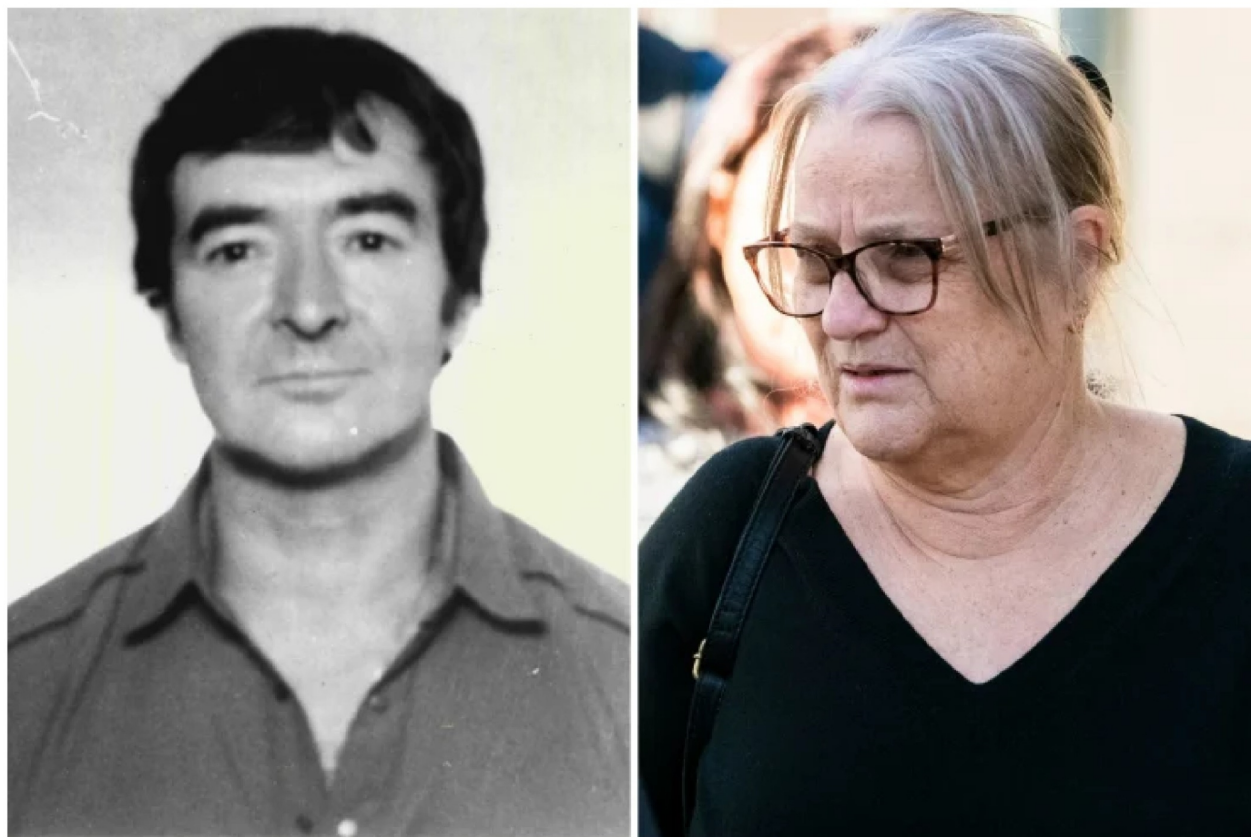
Early’s barrister, Jeffrey Clarke, described the case as a “whodunnit” and argued the Crown could not exclude the possibility another individual or group had attacked Keam.

One man gave evidence that his group of school friends from Alison Park talked about the death of Keam and one boy said, “I done it [sic], I killed him”. He did not tell police because he thought the boy “had a big mouth and he was lying”.

Under cross-examination, that teenager, now a man, denied inflicting the injuries on Keam, and said he had been at home and that there was no such discussion.

Clarke further argued prosecutors had not ruled out the reasonable possibility that Keam had been injured before January 12 or 13, possibly during karate sparring sessions, or that the hemorrhage was the result of a natural cause.

People close to Keam gave evidence he had a black belt in karate and appeared fit and uninjured before his death. His wife, Diane Smart, said he complained of a sore groin – “I think from his karate” – but had no marks on his face when she last saw him on January 11 before she travelled to Canberra.



A file image of Raymond Keam; Diane Smart leaves the NSW Supreme Court in Darlinghurst.

Keam had been due to meet her on the 16th. Smart said she [found out about his death on the news](#).

Early, previously known as Stanley Sutton, did not testify, but the court heard his past police statements and evidence at a 1988 inquest in which he claimed he had talked to a neighbour on the night of January 12, 1987, then watched TV and had coffee with his landlord until that man left between 1.30am and 2am.

Early said he heard voices in the park about 2.30am, including a man shouting words to the effect of “leave me alone, you’re hurting me” and “there’s my car” or “take my car”. He said they were noises “you hear karate guys make, sort of Bruce Lee-type”, but he had stayed in bed and fallen asleep.

The Crown relied on Early's alleged admissions to his brother, Barry Sutton, who said Early arrived at his home in Bundaberg, Queensland on January 14, 1987.

Sutton said Early stayed for a few days and told him "he had been in a bit of a blue, so he'd just come up", and that it was "in the park across the road".

Early was arrested in Victoria in August 2021 and extradited to NSW. An inmate, given the pseudonym Tom Brown, said he spoke with a "Stan" in custody who told him he was "in for murder".

Brown said he had joked "It's Stan the killer man" and Stan replied "not for over 30 years, you know, because of people's loose mouths, you know, I'll be spending the rest of my life in here".

He said he was later told by Stan there was a "park across the street" from his house, and it was "frequented by poofers with a gay sex problem".

Brown claimed Stan told him he "noticed a guy going back and forth", had confronted him and told a group of blokes "we have another one" before they "went and bashed him and left him".

Brown, two weeks before the trial, told the prosecutor he "made the whole thing up". But, in his evidence, he said he had been "freaking out" about testifying and being labelled a snitch with a target on his back.

Under cross-examination, Brown agreed that he did not come forward until September 2022, after reading an article about the death of Kean which said a \$1 million reward was offered, but denied fabricating the confession.

A detective said Brown's alleged conversations contained information that was not in the article, including that the accused lived across the road.

The case was one of 88 deaths [between 1976 and 2000 that were reviewed by police under Strike Force Parrabell](#) for having potential gay-hate bias.

Early will face a sentence hearing before Justice Dina Yehia on September 29.

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