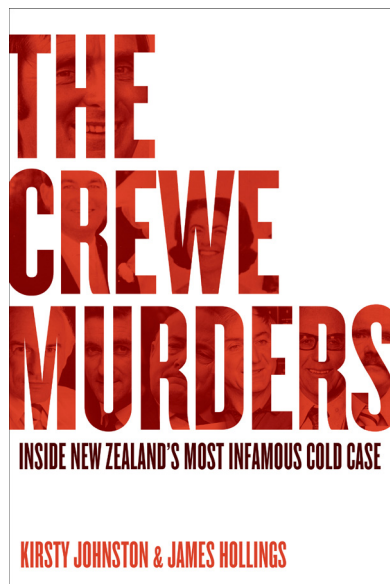




The Crewe Murders

Inside New Zealand's most infamous cold case

KIRSTY JOHNSTON & JAMES HOLLINGS



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A FRESH LOOK AT THE MURDERS OF HARVEY AND JEANNETTE CREWE

The murder of Harvey and Jeannette Crewe in their Pukekawa farmhouse in 1970 remains New Zealand's most infamous cold case.

It spawned two trials, two appeals, several books, a film, and eventually a royal commission finding of police corruption.

It also resulted in a free pardon, the only time the New Zealand government has bypassed the courts to set a convicted murderer free.

And still, the Crewes' killer has not been found.

Combining gripping narrative, detailed research and striking new testimony from those who were there, this book tells the complete story of the case for the first time.

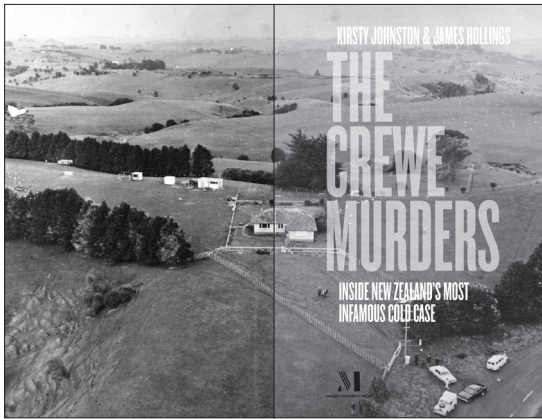
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KIRSTY JOHNSTON is an award-winning investigative journalist with an interest in inequality, gender and social justice. Her work has helped to change lives, through the banning of seclusion rooms in primary schools, and the repeal of a law that discriminated against family carers for the disabled. She began her career at the *Taranaki Daily News*, and has worked at Stuff, the *Sunday Star-Times* and the *New Zealand Herald*. She has made two documentaries. She was named Reporter of the Year at the 2022 Voyager Media Awards. She now works at RNZ..

JAMES HOLLINGS is Associate Professor of Journalism at Massey University, Wellington. He is the author of *A Moral Truth: 150 Years of Investigative Journalism in New Zealand* (Massey University Press, 2017) as well as numerous academic articles on journalism. At Massey he teaches investigative journalism, among other things. Before joining Massey he was a journalist for newspapers and radio both in New Zealand and overseas. He has also made two documentaries.

SALES POINTS

- An enduring and fascinating murder that has never been solved
- A clear look again at all the facts plus fresh new interviews
- Pacey, exciting read by seasoned journalists



Inside, the house was simple and functional, with a fire in the living room for winter, a small kitchen and a dedicated laundry. The Crowes furnished the main areas with a minimalist, old-school couch and chairs recovered by Joanne using her craftswoman skills. They didn't have any art on the walls, but they were happy to have art. At first, the house was too big for the young couple. At least one of the spare bedrooms was used for storage.

Joanne hadn't lived in Pakihia since her childhood and she had only returned for holidays and for a brief time in 1994 after her first divorce. At the time, she told Crowe Massey: "Joanne is a very small, but the excitement of being a new home was a little bit overwhelming for her. She had lived in her early years had had a few established town houses in Christchurch."

But, there she was, back in a village where everyone knew her; living out of her parents, a friend's wife. While the rest of the Western world was undergoing a social and cultural revolution, the small settlement of Pakihia could hardly be said to have been a night club. According to Joanne, Harvey did the same way about his new life, but the couple was pragmatic. It was a good farm and they were going to make the most of it, for the moment.

Life in Pakihia in the late 1980s was much the same as in any New Zealand farming town: it revolved around sheep prices and the weather. For sheep farmers like Harvey and Joanne, the value of wool was also the value of life. The sheep prices that had fallen throughout the region had to wait, and by the end of 1988 had dropped by 50 per cent. But despite his help for the past few years, and his well-earned wage money — in Ruge, Kaitiaki, Cambridge and Victoria — Harvey and Joanne remained relatively stable.

In those first years in their home, Joanne and Harvey worked in and worked. They bought a car, a blue Perren that Joanne used. Joanne planned a flower garden. They went to the school. They attended school functions. But, otherwise, the couple didn't really participate in community events. Joanne would either decline to go to a function or be invited to go to a function. She didn't care about the last event.

Some people might be grossly that she was a work. They did have regular meals with Joanne's parents, May and Len Denton, at the



Harvey and Joanne Crowe on their wedding day in Auckland, 1984.

number ran, was her extraordinarily old father, who didn't want to give up his farm. Later, the accused, Arthur Thomas, found the same redaction: that he was a local Anglican who had never given up his childhood crib, someone who he liked out of jealousy. His wife was the brain of the operation; she covered up for him.

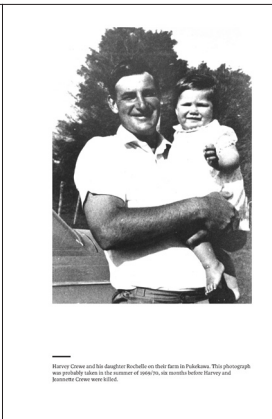
It was a redemptive story with a compelling cast of characters. But back in the place of Harvey Crowe holding his daughter opposite. The girl who the man had, except whenever it was a woman, they are outside in the sun. As he lifts her up, Harvey is laughing, his eyes sparkling at the camera. Bechtle catches her in his arms towards the camera, reaching for something just out of sight.

The photo was in some ways the catalyst for the book. Joanne came across it in a newspaper and while researching a biography for the journalist Pat Bechtle. Bechtle had argued that the Crowe murders were actually a murder-suicide. He believed Harvey had his wife, propositioned her to shoot and kill him, and then, struck with grief, kill herself. Joanne, who has two daughters, looked at that photo, saw a loving father, and wondered how that photo found that secret. He began to read more carefully about the investigations into the murders, and then contacted Bechtle to see if he would be willing to investigate the case.

An examination of the early police files found it wasn't only journalists who had sought to dramatize the Crowe and the other aspects and witnesses as he found their stories. Although some of the detectives were thorough and open-minded, many were quick to make sweeping judgements based on questionable assumptions about the couple whose killer they were seeking to find.

The officer in charge of the case, Detective Inspector Bruce Henton, 56 years to named victim, which raised the trajectory of the investigation from the very start. When his theory refused to stick up, he was found to have a more open-minded attitude to the case. Arthur Thomas, coating the most famous miscarriage of justice case in New Zealand history.

When we first began to consider the case, we planned to write an article on just one aspect, the side fixed with Harvey Crowe's body in the Waikato River in 1990. He was named and named in the book, so we thought, particularly not one that had already had its bones picked over so many times. But gradually, as we read more and more,



Harvey Crowe and his daughter Bechtle in their farm in Pakihia. This photograph was probably taken in the summer of 1988, before the murder of Joanne Crowe was solved.

to her, son. Using a large electro-stimulated made for them by a local medical firm, police searched the river for anything that might have been used as a murder.

Henton began to attempt to identify the car. He placed a crew of 15 national newspapers, calling for help from experts who might know its make by sight. Murray Jeffries also appeared on television with the heavy news, asking pointing out to the national television station, and the police, and the New Zealanders from the right-hand side.

The task of following up any leads was assigned to Detective Len Johnson, who had joined the inquiry team in mid-September. Johnson had investigated the burglary at the Crowe house three years earlier, but had been busy on another job over the previous months. Johnson's first task was to attempt to match the type of axle and to discover where it might have come from.

Meanwhile, Henton instructed Mike Christie to begin compiling a brief of evidence against Denton, a proven understatement before police arrest and charge a suspect. While Christie worked on the file, Henton interviewed Denton yet again, probing for that elusive confession. Henton accused Denton of covering up for all over Joanne and Harvey going missing. He pressed Denton repeatedly why he hadn't helped with the search or contacted Henton about progress on the case. Denton replied that he didn't want to know how the police began to consider his suspect. "I got my back up," he said. "I got my back up and I didn't want anything more to do with you." The case again ended, having nothing to do with the murders.

W hen two bodies, one, and no arrests, Henton was clearly under pressure to make progress. The Crowe homicides were extremely high-profile, involving two in one small part of Henton's track for solving the case on the front page of the national newspaper. Some of the senior senior readers were Auckland wealthy residents, who saw Joanne Crowe, a former pupil of St. Catherine's College, as one of their own. "I think it's what drove the army, the wife of Rimona. All talking about it," said Pickett in 2002. Among the St. Catherine's alumni there was a strong interest in the case and perhaps

Next, the superintendent was clapping his shoulder. "It wasn't just 'Thomas' anymore, it was 'Mr. Thomas' and 'The boy was a copy of you and his father', and it was just as quick as that. I would not be preferred back."

Thomas was led back to his cell. He had a 2000 men, so clear out his things. He put on his suit — the same suit he had bought to Reginald in 1988 and had worn on his second trial in 1993. Thomas was back in the water — his job for his past years work. He needed one last moment. He had a bottle of corned beef, which he had bought under the table and he wanted to have it with him in his cell. The man who was accompanying him. But I just thought, right, so I filled up the covers of the mattress, right in front of his eyes, you know, I'm in flight up — where — in the back, that's it, that's it.

After official announced when Thomas wanted to be taken, there was a moment of Henry Piddington's face when he was told there was no vehicle available or in the car. The prison car was in the workshop, and the superintendent's car was a 1970s day, after discussing about whether it was appropriate for the head of the country's maximum-security prison, to be caught driving an inmate to his freedom in an illegal vehicle. This was the way through the legal constraints. "It's good enough for the government to punish you, Arthur. It's good enough for the man to be in the car. It was not. Thomas had been warned not to sell again, so all he could say to his cellmates as he departed was, "Watch the news, you see, you see, and watch a news on the TV."

On Monday 9 December 1993 he left Piddington's prison a five min. He was driven in the superintendent's car to the Hamilton house of his suit and coat, Bechtle and Robert Lonsdale. There he sat down with the Bechtle, who had driven down from Auckland to meet him, to watch the six clock news on his release on the first colour television he had ever seen.

When a law academic came on screen to explain that the murder case the offences had not been committed, there were cheers. "Good one, I'm a new man. The conviction never happened," Thomas told the others.

By 10, he was heading back to Pakihia to stay with his pregnant brother. But because his mother, now aged 75, was not well enough to



The front page of the Auckland Star, 9 December 1993.

CHAPTER SIX
THE FIRST TRIAL

The day Arthur Thomas was charged with murder, Vivian Thomas arrived home from her appointment with the vic to find their farmhouse empty. Assuming her husband was still at the police station, she called to check that he had returned for the evening milking. "Probably, she was told by the officer who answered the phone at the station. She then had to wait a while before she could get in. But it wasn't Arthur. It was Detective Sergeant Mike Christie, and he was alone. "I have been personally by Inspector Henton to tell you that your husband has been arrested and charged with the murder of his wife and Joanne Crowe," he said.

"The man he looked like," she replied. Christie told her he advised her loyalty to her husband. "It's not loyalty, he said. It's innocence."

The deposition hearing was set down for 14 December 1993 at the Otahuhu Magistrate's Court. Arthur Thomas arrived, keeping his head down to try to avoid the newspaper photographers and onlookers. He was shocked and in handcuffs. The courtroom was full of local farmers, keen to hear what had really happened that night of 1988.

when someone had killed one of their own. From the dock, Arthur was also to catch glimpses of his wife and daughter in the back, he was led back to the court cells.

The purpose of a deposition hearing is to decide whether there is enough evidence to bring a case against the defendant. Usually, it is also the first time the defence counsel has a chance to cross-examine the witness. The Crown called to name witnesses, and the hearing went on to name them. As the court heard from the Crown, the hearing went on to name them. As the court heard from the Crown, the hearing went on to name them. As the court heard from the Crown, the hearing went on to name them.

Our next day, the court heard how Joanne knew Arthur as a child, and how she had lived and worked in Manurewa as a young woman, while Arthur lived nearby. A friend from her teenage years, Beverly Babin, said the court how Arthur had been living and working in Manurewa in the mid-1980s, that she found this understandable and that his situation fit with the evidence. Bechtle also said Arthur was usually early in general appearance and his shoes were particularly dirty. Her evidence made substantial headlines in the newspapers. The star said upon her quote that Arthur had had a partner for Joanne and said with it in his eyes.

Arthur's lover in Joanne while he was overseas and the gift of the bracelet and comb set was also advanced as evidence of this infidelity. Then, the court heard about the burglary and the fire in the park before the murders. Chief Justice on the Crown's behalf how Arthur had been in the Crowe house for a day or two and to use the matter while working for the local newspaper Ben Bechtle, it was found that the Crowes were wealthy while the Thomases were in debt.

who had means to have a grievance against Harvey who also had a link to the Thomas farm?

U nlike Bechtle Crowe, the Thomas family was not invited to the police conference the day the report was received. They were not invited to speak. Instead, Howard journalist David Fisher arrived in Pakihia later that afternoon to find Ben Thomas at home, leading through the report's pages, complaining about the police. "It's a whitewash," he said. "The police have covered up the case. They haven't come out, they haven't moved on the case."

His sister Margaret Stoney, who had arrived with her husband Bruce to go through the documents, said she was outraged. "They've taken care of what Bechtle wanted — she didn't want any member of her family accused. That doesn't mean the case is solved. Bechtle wants to know who incident? I think she did not want her family embarrassed. She said, 'I can say Arthur Thomas isn't a friend of a member of the family, but I'm not a friend of the family.'"

That afternoon, Des Thomas reported these views to every member of the media case. He said later that concerning the family, the report had actually said more about the vic. He believed that to get the truth, there needed to be an inquiry independent from the police. "All we want is justice, but we don't know who we're going to get it from," he said.

The Thomas family wasn't the only ones left flailing over the review in 2006. Henton's family gave an interview to the Herald's David Fisher, denying his involvement. He was a banished cop, they said, the cartilage case never would have been pursued. They described how, for years, he had picked up Bechtle Crowe on the way, how during the investigation, he'd taken home Bechtle Crowe's beloved cat, Boney, and would talk to it when he got home after long days in Pakihia. His daughter, Elin O'Neill, said for her father to be killed after her death was unfair, particularly when he had been so devoted to the police. "It's the justice that sets you," he said.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
BULLETS, WIRE, AXLE

I t's heart of the debate over who killed the Crowes has always revolved around three pieces of evidence: the bullet, the wire and the axle. As the only physical links between the offender and the crime scene, each has undergone numerous misinterpretations to support litigation against one suspect, or to bolster another theory.

In 1993, this vital evidence formed the basis for the prosecution of Arthur Thomas along with the now-discredited cartilage case.

In 2004, the police review team supported this view slightly, saying it had shown how Ben Bechtle with the Thomas farm, rather than Arthur Thomas himself. In finding about how numerous expert reports about the witness of ballistics and metallurgy, and a close examination of the police inquiry documents and court transcripts and from the royal commission evidence. Much of what the report said to new beyond reasonable doubt: the vic, for example, has attracted considerable criticism that it was wrongly identified. That some highly responsible, equally, the rifle belonging to the three family simply cannot have fired the fatal bullet.