



Inferno: The raging fire as photographed by a neighbour; police take items from Katie Foreman's car, which was parked outside her home.

Pictures: ORLANDO CHIODO

Beautiful friend mourned



Strong bond: Ingrid Thompson outside the burnt shell of her friend's home yesterday.

By BEVAN SHIELDS

AN encounter with a lawyer can be an experience many are happy to forget.

But for Ingrid Thompson, a chance visit to fresh-faced young solicitor Katie Foreman earned her a trusted friend.

Their strong bond, formed during a three-year Family Court battle, came to an abrupt end this week when Ms Foreman, 31, was found dead after a fire at her home in Doncaster St, Corrimal.

"I cannot believe someone so beautiful has gone in such an awful, awful way," Ms Thompson said.

Police towed Ms Foreman's car yesterday afternoon while forensic experts continued to trawl through the two-storey home, which has been declared a crime scene since the fire broke out at 2.30am on Thursday.

New footage of the fire has also emerged, showing fierce flames bursting from the top-floor bedroom of the home, debris falling onto the bonnet of Ms Foreman's car and smoke pouring from the roof. The footage, captured by a neighbour on a mobile phone, was handed to police.

Police have not discounted the possibility the blaze was the work of an arsonist or connected to her work as a criminal and family law lawyer.

Detectives are probing numerous leads, including claims Ms Foreman had told neighbours she was worried about a prowler, and reports a man and woman were laughing in the street just before the fire.

They are also looking into why the front door of the house was wide open when the blaze began.

Ms Thompson said her friend had many reasons to be happy in the weeks before her death.

Business at her newly opened Wollongong legal practice was picking up and she had just bought a new car.

"She was so excited - everything was going really well for her," Ms Thompson said.

Ms Foreman graduated from Smith's Hill High School in 1998 and from the University of Wollongong in 2005.

She worked for Legal Aid NSW out of its Wollongong office and at private practices in Wollongong and Nowra before opening her own business earlier this year.



Trusted: A photo of Katie Foreman taken by Ingrid Thompson on a train trip to Sydney for a court hearing.

Michael Sergent, a senior lawyer at Legal Aid NSW in Wollongong, said he and other colleagues were deeply saddened by her death.

Ms Foreman did her postgraduate practical legal training placement with Legal Aid NSW and eventually got a job there as a family law solicitor.

"My colleagues here are shocked and bewildered by her tragic passing," Mr Sergent said.

"She was a quiet achiever, very highly respected by the legal profession, very kind and just a beautiful person.

"A colleague rang me from Nowra this morning and said they'd had a call from one of Katie's clients who just broke down over the phone," he said.

"The man on the phone said something like 'she really cared about me and my case', so she was very devoted to her clients, obviously."

Her death was recognised at the Law Society of NSW Annual Member Dinner in Sydney on Thursday night.

A minute's silence was also observed at Nowra Court House yesterday.

A spokesperson for NSW Police said there had been no arrests.

Anyone with information should call Wollongong Police or Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.

FIRE FOOTAGE

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Broadcast plan has tangled web of consequences

By NICOLE HASHAM

A WOLLONGONG City Council plan to broadcast council meetings live on the internet could spark privacy and defamation concerns.

Councillors next week will consider the webcast proposal, designed to break geographical boundaries, improve transparency and trigger interest in the

council's decision-making.

Around Australia, councils are split on whether the legal risks and financial costs of webcasting make it worthwhile.

Some councils have dismissed the practice amid fears it could lead to defamation and privacy breaches.

In NSW, Port Stephens Council is expected to reject webcasting at its next meeting on cost and

technical-capability grounds.

The technology is in place at several NSW councils including Lane Cove, Warringah and Shellharbour, which introduced it in September 2009.

Shellharbour City Council's group manager of corporate services, Tony Gearon, said a verbal message at the start of each meeting addressed privacy concerns by advising that proceed-

ings were being broadcast.

He said the statement also warned councillors and the public to "behave themselves" in a bid to ward off potentially defamatory comments.

In Victoria, Wellington Shire Council put a halt to webcasting in 2006 due to defamation concerns, but reintroduced it with an eight-second broadcast delay.

Wollongong Greens councillor

Jill Merrin, who will move a motion on Monday in favour of the practice, believes it will help restore faith in the decision-making process.

Wollongong Lord Mayor Gordon Bradbery said a council report would examine legal and cost issues, but he supported any moves which made the council process more accessible and accountable to the public.