

Personal Opinion on "Frank Bangay Way"

I have been surprised and heartened by the reaction right across the media, the story has been treated as a "silly season, what is he on about", rather than "gay-bashing village". The press reports, emails, web comments, and chats on the street see this as an attack on the Bangay family, but there is also a genuine concern that this might provoke a reaction against gay people in general. These days gay people are seen as just people, being gay does not define them, it is a facet of the person, like being Christian, a truck mechanic or jogger. These days we all have friends and relatives and neighbours who are gay, that is modern life.

That Initial Complaint

19th April Dear Mike

My husband and I just had a quick look round the new Crest estate. We were horrified to see a road named as above. Whilst I understand that Frank Bangay was a prominent local resident, surely someone should have seen the other interpretation. It is homophobic. I find it offensive. Frank Way would work and could hardly offend anyone.

Whilst I appreciate you may be currently up for reelection, what can be done about it?

Kind regards X

Sound Advice

When the first complaint dropped into my inbox I realised that as a 69 year old heterosexual male, I could not rely on wholly on my instinct, and wanted to run the complaint past gay friends. The overwhelming consensus was :

"Mike

As promised I have sought feedback from the XXX LGBT Network.

There was a very good response from the Network. A few thought while the naming was unfortunate, that adding Frank to the name and having ' Frank Bangay Road' was a good solution.

The "Way" was also commented on hence Road (Mead, Drive etc)

However the majority of responses concluded that 1) It was neither offensive nor homophobic and 2) it was actually quite funny."

The Considered Response

To be honest, I was more worried about backlash, so decided that I would not take the complaint further, so responded :

Sorry, Xxxx,

I think you are being over sensitive. If you had lived through the years of the association with the many members of the Bangay family, the connection simply would not have occurred to you. It is not homophobic, it is a family's name, and I find it very troubling that you find it offensive.

That said, the process to allocate the names for new roads is completely public, and you had the opportunity then to register your disapproval.

I think it is exactly that sort of militant sensitivity that fuels anti-gay feelings, so your request could well backfire.

Even if there were something that could be done, I would resist strongly any attempt to change the name. I do not intend to make public your request, I will leave that as your decision, and I would have no qualms whatsoever if you did try and make it an election issue.

Regards Mike

In Conclusion

I have had gay friends all my life, even whilst in the Army in the 60s, when being gay was still a criminal offence, the Wolfenden report did not lead to a change in the Law until 1967. Those friends were risking jailtime as civilians, in the Army they risked hard-time in Colchester or Shepton Mallet Military Prisons followed by Dishonourable Discharge, (those names still send a chill down the spine of an old sweat like me, the Army was pretty barbaric in those days). And I could tell you some comical yarns about a transgender bi-sexual Army cook called Pete !!

I am proud of the tolerant way Borough Green reacted to this, I am proud to live in a Britain that accepts everyone, whatever colour, religion, race or ethnic background, even truck-drivers and Jeremys. We have the occasional hiccup, but if you think about it, those hiccups are usually caused by the fundamentalists from those minorities, most of us are just ordinary people rubbing along and getting on with life.

The real irony in all this, is that we wanted Frank Bangay Way in the first place, but the Borough Council doesn't normally allow double names for streets. We have just had the final decision from TMBC, announcing that Bangays Way would not be changed.

The rather silly comment provoked discussion across the world, I even received a clipping from the Cyprus Times taken by a friend on holiday, this has really put Borough Green on the map!

And a final bonus - as Borough Green is in the commuter belt, there is a large population turnover. When I was canvassing in 2013 to get support to dedicate the new Potters Mede to Frank Bangay, I was shocked at how quickly such an important person had slipped from the public memory in the few short years since his death in 1999. But this ill-intended complaint has actually triggered a refreshing of Frank's memory, most press reports carried a potted history, and so today everyone knows who Frank was and what he did for Borough Green.

To paraphrase Frank himself " **Vivat Frank Bangay**"

Gay couple outraged over 'homophobic' street sign

ACCIDENTALLY offensive street names are an issue that the UK seems to excel at.

The latest to cause anger and misunderstanding is Bangays Way in Borough Green, Kent which was named after local historian Frank Bangay.

A gay married couple who live in the small village. Philip and Ian Tucker, have declared the road name offensive and have even petitioned the local MP.

Mr Tucker said: "My husband and I went to look round the new development, as you do.

"Having got over the initial humour, we reflected that this street name was actually pretty offensive.

"Somehow seeing it on the sign made it look even worse. We are pretty sure the sign will be subject to frequent vandalism and possible theft."



